

Advice for buying food online

If you buy food online, and you're not using a well-known or trusted seller, there are a number of checks you can do to help you buy with confidence. The checks can also help you decide to use another seller if you're not sure the food is safe – or is what it says it is.

Check who you would be buying from

It might be a limited company (the business name ends with 'Limited' or 'Ltd'), a sole trader (an individual selling from a private address, for example) or a partnership between two or more parties. If it's not clear who you are dealing with, don't buy from them.

The business has a physical address or phone number

Find out where the business is located or call the number if you're unsure. These details may be listed under the 'Contact us' section or in the terms and conditions. Any website selling food must provide a postal address. If the business has no address, do not buy from them.

Food Hygiene Rating

Food businesses selling food online may also be rated by the local authority as part of the Food Hygiene Rating Scheme. You can check if they are rated and the score at the [Food Standards Agency](http://www.food.gov.uk) site (some businesses are exempt from rating).

You're protected

Think twice if the business is based outside of Europe – you will not be protected by European consumer protection laws. UK consumers who purchase food from a distance seller in a non-European Union country cannot rely on the protection of UK food law. A website ending in '.co.uk' is not a guarantee that the business is based in the UK.

Other shoppers' feedback is good

Try searching for reviews of the product or the seller – do these seem genuine?

Spelling mistakes

Are there spelling or grammar mistakes on the site and lots of them? This can mean a business is not run professionally.

It's a secure site

Ways to tell the site is encrypted and your details will be kept secure:

- At checkout, the web address displayed by your browser starts with 'https' and not 'http'.
- A padlock or unbroken key icon is displayed in your browser.

You're being dazzled by a bargain

Are the prices incredibly low? If they look too good to be true, they probably are – particularly if some of your other checks have put doubts in your mind.

Be aware that criminals exploit high demand

When a food becomes the next 'big thing' whether it be a food supplement or a superfood, there can sometimes be delays whilst well-known retailers carryout safety tests to ensure the food complies with the law and secure reputable supply lines. The void can be filled by crooks selling untested food that can put people in danger.

Be aware of food fraud / crime

Food fraud is a dishonest act or omission, relating to the production or supply of food, which is intended for personal gain or to cause loss to another party.

Food crime is dishonesty relating to the production or supply of food, that is either complex or likely to be seriously detrimental to consumers, businesses or the overall public interest.

Some examples include:

- the sale of food which is unfit and potentially harmful, such as:
 - recycling of animal by-products back into the food chain
 - illegally slaughtered or stolen meat
 - packing and selling of beef, poultry and fish with an unknown origin
 - knowingly selling goods which are past their 'use by' date
 - using industrial dyes such as sudan 1 in food.

- the deliberate mis-description of food, for example selling farmed salmon sold as wild, Basmati rice adulterated with cheaper varieties and almond powders bulked up with peanut.
- making false statements about the source of ingredients, i.e. their geographic, plant or animal origin.

The National Food Crime Unit (NFCU) wants to hear about both food fraud and food crime. Any dishonesty in the food supply chains within the UK are serious and will need to be addressed, either by the relevant local authority or with the support of the NFCU. Call Food Crime Confidential on **0207 276 8787** or email foodcrime@foodstandards.gsi.gov.uk

Don't believe everything you read

Some businesses make a lot of money making bogus claims such as that a food can cure or treat medical conditions, or are a quick way to lose weight without needing to diet or exercise. Be sceptical of any claims that appear to be too good to be true, even those claims in magazine articles may be unsubstantiated.

Food problem? Report it!

If you think an online seller is selling food that is not hygienic or safe, you can report the business to their local food safety team: www.food.gov.uk/report-problem

If food you've bought has made you suspicious about its what it says it is or its labelling is incorrect, report it to the Citizens Advice consumer service on via the website or **03454 040 506**

Buying online to sell on?

If you do this you are assuming the legal responsibilities of a business to ensure that what you're selling complies with a wide range of food safety and standards legislation. For more information, check:

www.food.gov.uk/business-industry

www.gov.uk/food-safety-your-responsibilities

www.businesscompanion.info/en/quick-guides/food-and-drink