

# Smoothies pour into cost of living basket

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Could Britons be getting healthier? Fruit smoothies are in, ready meals and microwaves are out.

The latest basket of goods and services used by national statisticians to monitor inflation reflects a changing attitude to food, the abandoning of camera films and CD singles, but also a tendency to buy lager in multipacks.

The 61st annual shakeup from the Office of National Statistics reflects what it calls a growing "cafe culture" with muffins as well as smoothies going into the basket for the first time.

"Fruit smoothies are included as the emerging market of healthy soft drinks continues to rise in supermarkets," it said.

"Muffins are included for the first time to represent snacks such as croissants and cakes that people generally buy with a coffee in cafes around the UK."

The ONS collects about 120,000 prices every month for a basket of about 650 goods and services.

It uses the data to calculate the main measures of inflation, which are then used by the Bank of England to help set interest rates and by employers to help decide wage rises.

This year's updated basket list out yesterday shows once-popular cases of "stubbies", or smaller beer bottles, are out, with the ONS noting they are simply not as in demand as 10 years ago.

To reflect changing spending patterns the statisticians have this year added crates of 20 bottles of lager in regular-sized measures of 275ml-330ml.

Elsewhere in the food and drink category, frozen vegetarian ready meals are out to make room for better coverage of fresh vegetables.

Small varieties of oranges, such as satsumas and mandarins, and peppers have been added to reflect the swings in their prices.

With the ready meals, microwave ovens also make an exit this year, having first entered the inflation basket in the 1980s. Their falling price means spending on microwaves has fallen and so they are no longer worth including, says the ONS.

Aside from a growing appetite for fresh foods, this year's basket also portrays a society that has grown tired of repairing and cleaning and one that instead opts for replacements. Washable carpets are out as are TV repair bills.

"TV repairs are removed from the basket this year because spending has been decreasing for a number of years as television prices fall and technology and reliability improves.

"Also, people increasingly replace broken televisions rather than fix them, especially with the current dominance of flat panel screens," says the ONS.

The ONS has finally called time on 35mm camera film this year, having removed the corresponding non-digital cameras last year.

Camera film has been replaced by "portable digital storage media", which covers a range of gadgets including memory cards and USB storage sticks.

Reflecting a sharp fall in CD single sales over the last decade, top-40 CD singles have been tossed out.

The move echoes a growing trend towards buying singles as digital downloads.

Physical CD single sales have slumped from an annual 77.8m in 1997 to just 8.6m in 2007.

Downloads have soared from 5.8m in 2004 to 78m in 2007, according to data from the Official UK Charts Company and music industry body BPI.

But the ONS is not writing off the CD altogether. Chart CD albums remain in the inflation basket and this year, for the first time, non-chart "classic" albums by artists such as U2, Pink Floyd and Madonna are added.

Finally, technological advances have also forced steering lock devices out of this year's basket as spending on them has dropped "in line with improved 'onboard' security of newer cars such as automatic steering wheel locks", the ONS said.

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## **In**

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Small varieties of oranges

Peppers

Fruit smoothies

Non-chart CD albums

Muffins

Portable digital storage devices (eg USB sticks)

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## **Out**

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Top 40 CD singles

Frozen vegetarian ready meals

Lager stubbies (small bottles)

TV repairs

Microwaves

Washable carpets

35mm camera films