

I'm going health crazy this week. I've been on the running machine twice and even turned down a tattie scone and fried egg roll. At this rate I expect to live until a hundred. Of course next week I may take up absinthe and lying around, but it will be my choice. I might only live a few more years, but they will be lived on my own terms.

All this pondering started when I heard about the government in Holyrood wanting to ban something called trans fats from our food. Trans fats do not occur naturally in anything. They were invented by food manufacturers who have messed around so much with our food that they ended up needing some sort of glue to hold everything back together. It also acts as a preservative. Have you ever wondered why bread from a proper baker goes dry and mouldy after a few days and the stuff from the supermarket lasts for weeks?

Trans fats are constructed using liquid vegetable oils and are proven to cause heart disease, diabetes and strokes. A few of our more enlightened shops have banned them, but they are still present in many of the foods we eat every day. Despite what manufacturers say, labelling does not make it clear that trans fats are used, so you may not even be aware when you are eating them.

Our government is trying to protect us not so much from ourselves as from the dishonest and greedy companies who are pretending to provide us with healthy food at a reasonable price and are instead slowly poisoning us. I hope they do get banned.

In the same week, Terence Stephenson, head of the Royal College of Paediatrics, has called for a ban on smoking in cars with children in the back. Just like the SNP government, he is seeking to protect those whose health is being damaged by people more powerful than they are. When I first heard about this, my immediate reaction was to agree with the doctor. After all, these youngsters are too

young to know any better, and even if they did they are powerless to do anything about it.

Parents decide things for children and some parents will choose to inflict their smoke on their children. My parents had the excuse of not knowing how bad cigarettes were but nowadays we all know the dangers. So we ban smoking around children and everyone is happy.

But let's think about this for a minute. There's a lot of things we expose our children to that aren't good. Television, car fumes, sugar, negative thoughts, poor grammar. The list is endless and we can't ban all of them.

If we allow people to have children in the first place, then we must trust parents to bring them up as best they can. It is our government's responsibility to make us aware of health dangers. They finance the research and provide advice based on the results. In some cases they legislate to protect us; for example in banning sunbed use and alcohol for children or the use of thalidomide drugs for pregnant women. But in the majority of cases, they make us aware of the facts, give us advice and let us get on with it ourselves.

We don't live in a police state thank goodness. Trying to legislate for everything will not always have the intended outcome. An Aberdeenshire GP is suspended at the moment, because he treated a 14 year old girl for a sexually transmitted disease and never reported it to the local social work department. He says he had no reason to suspect she was being abused, and argues that if youngsters cannot trust their doctors, they will not seek medical help when they need it.

Health policy is a balancing act; banning trans fats and banning car-smoking are two steps on one continuum. We will all have our own views on how best to improve the health of – let's face it – one very unhealthy country. My advice to those

of you lucky enough to be able to make informed choices is to choose to be healthy and to look after those for whom you are responsible. But it is and should remain just that – advice.