

# Keep your English up to date

## GM

Professor David Crystal

In the mid-1990s there was a new big, controversy that came in, wasn't there, about genetically modified foods: foodstuffs containing genetically altered plant or animal material. And it wasn't long before an abbreviation came along to summarise all these: genetically modified – G.M. or "genetic modification".

Now that's a pretty technical abbreviation; you might not expect to encounter it very often, but actually, you do. Because it was controversial at the time and people didn't know whether to put this stuff into their foods or not (and it still is controversial), you began to see it on signs – especially after 1996, when the food labelling regulations came in, and they applied in Britain in, 1999 I think it was – and from that point on, people had to say, if you were a restaurant owner or a café owner, you had to say whether your foods had G.M. in them or not – and so you walk into a restaurant these days, and you might well see a sign on the wall saying "no G.M. foods here" or "the following foodstuffs have G.M. products inside".

And people I've often asked them often asked you know, what do you think G.M. means? And they guess all sorts of things. Some people have told me it means "good morning food". Somebody else told me it was a "gold medal" food. Well – it doesn't mean any of those things. It means "genetically modified", that's all!



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