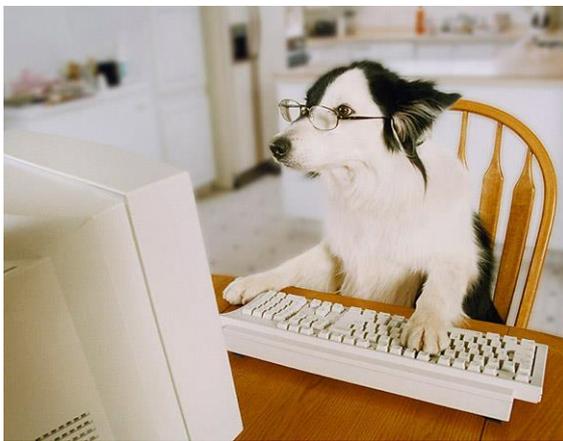


HEALTH INFORMATION ONLINE – WHO CAN YOU TRUST?

Trust. We couldn't manage without it. Trusting people to give you the right information about illnesses and treatments is important to help you get better and to give you confidence you are getting the right kind of help. You should be able to trust your doctor and other health-care professionals but what happens when you look for health information on line?



“On the internet, nobody knows you're a dog”

Peter Steiner

Absolutely anyone can post information on the internet. University professors, researchers, quacks, cranks and snake-oil salesmen. So how do you know who you can trust?

Please note – you should discuss any worries about your health with your GP or the healthcare professionals looking after you in the first instance.

For further information contact the JET Library at
lr.leighton@chester.ac.uk or call 01270 273172

Most people start with Google. You can find some good information on there but Google is a *commercial* company with shareholders and it needs to make a profit. It does this by carrying adverts. Some – perhaps most – of these adverts are for legitimate medicines and treatments but *all* of them are designed to get you to part with your money and none of them are unbiased. They want you to buy *their* products.

So who can I trust online? Check out the address.

There are some great web sites you can go to for health information which will be covered later in the leaflet but sites whose addresses end in ... **.org.uk**, **.ac.uk** or **.nhs.uk** are more likely to be reliable.

.org.uk web sites are produced by charities like Cancer Research or the British Heart Foundation and – because they are charities not commercial organizations - are more likely to contain unbiased information. However, some non-profit-making organisations can promote a particular treatment or course of action with good intentions, even though research shows that's not the best way of treating a particular condition.

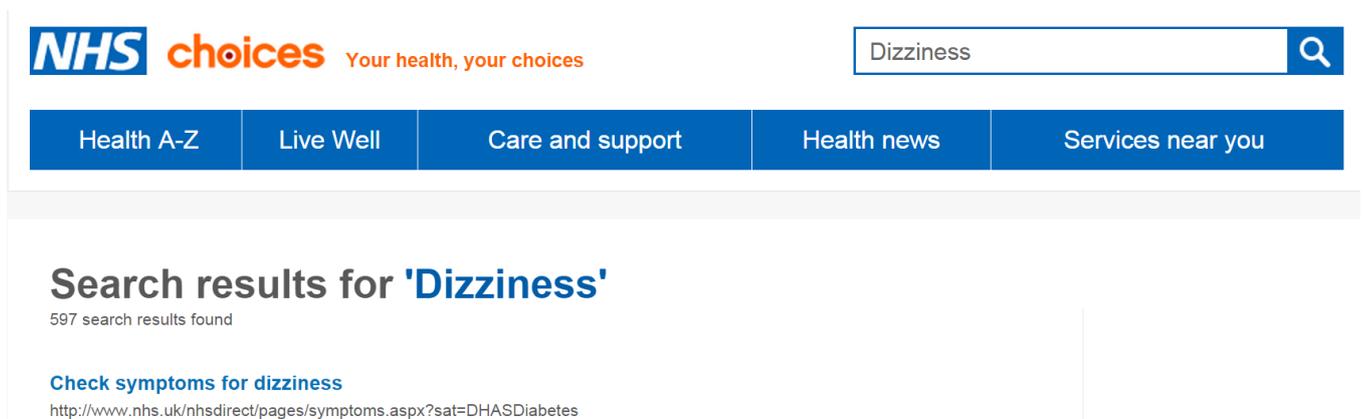
.ac.uk web sites are sites of universities or colleges who (in theory, at any rate) should be more concerned with researching into the truth than making money. But even colleges and universities contain the odd researcher with a bee in their bonnet who are in a minority of one as far as treating a particular illness is concerned.

.nhs.uk web sites are the most reliable. The information on them has been put there by experts after reviewing the best available evidence compiled from high-quality research studies.

NHS Choices – www.nhs.uk

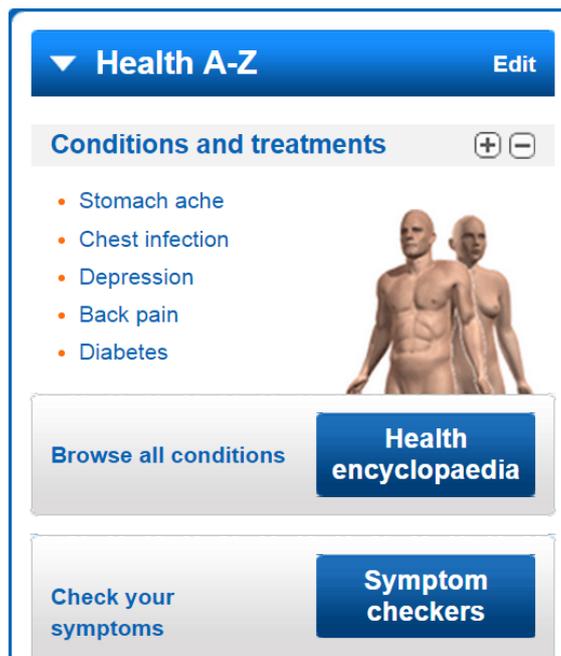
NHS Choices has been put together by experts working for the NHS. It uses the best available information from hundreds of research studies and, because it's compiled by NHS doctors it will recommend the best course of treatment not the most profitable one.

On the NHS Choices web site you can use the search box at the top of the screen to search for information about different illnesses or symptoms.



The screenshot shows the NHS Choices website interface. At the top left is the NHS Choices logo with the tagline "Your health, your choices". To the right is a search box containing the word "Dizziness" and a magnifying glass icon. Below the search box is a navigation bar with five blue buttons: "Health A-Z", "Live Well", "Care and support", "Health news", and "Services near you". Below the navigation bar, the search results are displayed under the heading "Search results for 'Dizziness'", with a sub-heading "597 search results found". A link "Check symptoms for dizziness" is provided, along with a URL: <http://www.nhs.uk/nhsdirect/pages/symptoms.aspx?sat=DHASDiabetes>.

You can also use the Health A-Z to browse through an alphabetical list of conditions or check your symptoms using the Symptom Checker.



The screenshot shows the "Health A-Z" section of the NHS Choices website. It features a blue header with a dropdown arrow and the text "Health A-Z", and an "Edit" button. Below the header is a section titled "Conditions and treatments" with expand (+) and collapse (-) icons. A list of conditions is shown: Stomach ache, Chest infection, Depression, Back pain, and Diabetes. To the right of the list is an illustration of a male and female human figure. Below the list are two buttons: "Browse all conditions" and "Health encyclopaedia". At the bottom, there are two more buttons: "Check your symptoms" and "Symptom checkers".

Behind the Headlines – getting to the truth behind the hype

The NHS Choices web site also has a section called Behind the Headlines which analyses news stories to see how much truth there is behind them.

It looks at who carried out the studies, whether they were done well, what the results were and whether the results have been exaggerated by the newspaper or TV channel which reported them.

▼ **Behind the Headlines** Edit

Fact or fiction?
Your guide to the science behind health stories in the news



NHS Choices health news + -

- Weighing yourself every day may help with weight loss
- New chlamydia vaccine shows promise after being tested on mice
- Too soon to say if breastfeeding problems could be genetic
- Smoking causes half of all deaths in 12 different cancers

NHS Evidence – evidence.nhs.uk

The NHS Evidence web site has been put together by the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE). It's aimed at NHS staff but it's free to use and you don't need to have a user name and password. The home page is a very simple Google-style search box but the information you will find is of a much higher quality.



All of the information on NHS Evidence has to reach a certain standard so you can be sure it's reliable, unbiased and based on a thorough analysis of all the best evidence. The results include Clinical Knowledge Summaries, compiled by NICE after a detailed review of the evidence, systematic reviews (reviews of lots of different research) from the Cochrane Library and information about different drugs as well as guidance from NICE, royal colleges and other official bodies. Information with the accreditation symbol has come from an organization which has had to comply with strict processes and procedures in the way it produces material.



Look for this symbol for information from accredited providers.

Other sources of information for patients

There are a number of other web sites where you can find high-quality patient information

Patient.info

Patient.co.uk is put together by a not-for-profit company which makes enough money to cover its costs and puts any surplus back into developing its web site. It does a similar job to NHS Choices and has got a search box at the top of the screen you can use to search for illnesses and a symptom checker. You can also create an account to keep track of diet and exercise and help you live more healthily and join a forum to meet other people with the same problems as you.



Health Talk Online – healthtalk.org

Health Talk Online is put together by a charity called DIPex and Oxford University. It contains patients' stories – mostly videos of what it feels like to have a particular disease or condition. You can search for your own illness or browse through an alphabetical list and there is a section for young people.

Great Ormond Street – Children's Zone

<http://www.gosh.nhs.uk/children>

Great Ormond Street's web site has information aimed at children and teenagers. They can search for their own illness, find out about the experience of coming to, staying in and leaving hospital and see real-life stories from other patients, and there is a separate section for teenagers.

What if I'm not sure about a web site?

If you do come across a web site that seems interesting how do you assess its quality?

There are a number of ways you can do this. The **Health on the Net Foundation** is a U.S. organization that monitors the quality of health information on the internet. They outline a number of criteria you can use to judge a site by including:

- Authority – who are the authors and what are their qualifications?
- Attribution – does the site back up its claims with references to reputable journals?
- Currency – How up-to-date is a web site? Most sites should have something saying 'last updated on ...' so you can check how old the information is
- Does it describe how a treatment works?
- Does it describe the benefits AND risks of a particular treatment?
- Does it talk about any potential side effects?
- Does it talk about other treatments?
- Transparency – How clearly worded is the site. Are there contact details for the people running it?
- Financial openness – Does the site clearly say who is paying for it?
- Advertising policy – Is there a clear distinction between editorial content and advertising?

You can search accredited web sites at

<https://www.healthonnet.org/HONsearch/Patients/index.html>

and the sites which have been accredited by the Health on the Net Foundation all have the symbol somewhere on them.





In the U.K. the equivalent scheme is the Information Standard – a quality kite-mark which assures people that the organization that produces the information has

undergone a rigorous assessment and that the information they produce is clear, accurate, impartial, evidence-based and up-to-date. They have their own logo too so look out for it on web sites you visit.

REMEMBER:

Anyone can put information on the internet and not everyone has your best interests at heart.

Google is a commercial company so look out for links marked as adverts.

Look for websites ending in **ac.uk**, **org.uk** or **nhs.uk**. In general these will be more reliable.

Start off with NHS Choices or NHS Evidence – they will have the best-quality information.

Other good places include patient.co.uk, Health Talk Online and Great Ormond Street for children and teenagers.

And don't forget to ask:

- Who has written this and what are their qualifications?
- What information are people basing this on?
- How old is this information?
- Who is paying for it?
- Are they going to make money from me?

This information is available in audio, Braille, large print and other languages. To request a copy, please telephone 01270 273172.