Environmental health
Family Violence
Older people in hospital – Get well soon
Health checks
Healthy Eating

Nutrition for life

Healthy mind
Healthy pregnancy
Immunisation

Services and support

Aged care services
Alcohol and drug services
LGBTI support
Carers, caring and respite care services
Child, family and relationship services
Disability services
Emergency, crisis and support services
End of life and palliative care services
Hospitals, surgery and procedures
Mental health services
Planning and coordinating healthcare

Pregnancy and birth services

A-Z

Conditions and treatments
Healthy living
Services and support
Videos
Service profiles

Blog
Blog authors
Topics

Podcast

Influenza - Dr Brett Sutton & Prof Kanta Subbarao
Trauma - Anne Leadbeater OAM & Dr Rob Gordon
Template

Other sites

Health.vic
DHHS
Services Online

Sitemap

My Health Life

Facebook
Googleplus
Twitter
Youtube
Rss

Conditions and treatments
Healthy living
Services and support
A-Z
Blog
Podcast

Health information and health products online

BetterHealth Channel

Back to Environmental health

Home
Healthy living
Environmental health
Health information and health products online

Health information and health products online
Summary

- Online health consumers should be wary because medical misinformation or 'cyberquackery' is rife.
- Make sure the website is owned by a reputable organisation before you decide to trust its content.
- Don't use online health information to self-diagnose – always see your doctor.
- Online health consumers should be wary because medical misinformation or 'cyberquackery' is rife.
- Make sure the website is owned by a reputable organisation before you decide to trust its content.
- Don't use online health information to self-diagnose – always see your doctor.

Using the internet to find health and medical information can help you make more informed decisions about your health, but it is not a substitute for seeing a doctor. Although some health information available on the internet can be valuable, you need to be aware of the risks because medical misinformation or 'cyberquackery' is rife.

It is important to know how to recognise a reputable site. Watch out for scams or dodgy information and don't self-diagnose or self-medicate using online information. Always consult your doctor for proper diagnosis and treatment advice.

Why people seek health information online

A 2010 Nielsen study showed that searching for health and medical information was among the top 10 internet activities for online Australians over 16 years of age. We go online to find health information for a range of reasons, including to:

- Gather more information about a medically diagnosed disease or illness
- Find out about alternative medical treatments
- Get a 'second opinion'
- Seek support from other internet users who have the same kind of medical disease or illness (via 'chat rooms', online discussion forums, blogs or communities, or social media such as Facebook)
- Find relevant patient support groups or other healthcare services
- Resolve conflicting health information.

Around a quarter of all Australians regularly seek health information online. It is expected that this will increase as more people use the internet to supplement their doctor's advice. However, it seems that the vast majority of people still seek medical attention for diagnosis and information about prescription medication or for a referral.

The dangers of self-diagnosis

It is important not to use online health information to self-diagnose or self-medicate. Always see your doctor or another healthcare professional registered with the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (AHPRA).

Self-diagnosis using medical websites is always tricky, because the information provided tends to relate to specific medical conditions rather than your particular situation. For example, if you type the symptom 'stomach pain' into the search engine of a general health and medical website, it may offer gastritis, appendicitis, irritable bowel syndrome or gastroenteritis for further information.

It would be a mistake to consider these suggestions as diagnoses. Your stomach pain could be caused by a build up of gas following the baked beans and eggs you had for lunch, or it may indicate a life-threatening emergency.

Safety issues include:

- The diagnosis may be wrong.
- Self-medication may delay your visit to the doctor and may mean you miss out on a proper diagnosis.
- Without proper medical attention, you may not receive the appropriate treatment for your condition.
- In the case of serious illness, a delay in medical treatment may cause serious complications or death.
- The treatment you choose may have unwanted side effects or interact with your other medications, treatments, alcohol or other drugs.

Be wary of online health and medical products

A huge range of health and medical products are sold online. It is very difficult to judge a good quality product from a poor one over the internet. Be cautious and consult with your doctor or healthcare professional before parting with your money.

While some products are available from reputable companies, others are marketed by unscrupulous people wanting to get rich from gullible online consumers. The product you purchase could be bogus, may contain harmful ingredients not shown on the label or may be unsuitable for your condition.
Finding a reliable health information website

Remember that this or any other checklist isn't foolproof. Generally speaking, you should ask yourself the following questions before deciding whether to trust the information presented on a medical website:

- Who is responsible for the content? Check whether the website is owned or sponsored by a reputable organisation. Every affiliation should be clearly shown on the home page or via a link from the home page.
- Look for credentials and qualifications. Be especially wary if the people responsible for the content are anonymous.
- Can you contact the owners of the website via email, telephone, fax, regular mail and street address? Be wary if the owners don't offer any means of communication.
- Are the sponsors directly influencing the content? Is the role of the sponsor(s) clearly outlined?
- Does the website provide information about both the benefits and risks of treatments or therapies? Do they discuss more than one option? Do they compare the costs and effectiveness of each treatment or therapy? Does each article include a list of references? Are the references from reputable organisations or publications?
- Is there a review process for the content? Are the clinical or scientific articles reviewed regularly by professionals in the field who are not directly employed by the website owners? Is the review process explained?
- Is the information recent and regularly updated? Is each article dated? Is the editorial process explained?

'User-friendly' health information

You should also find a health information website that is easy to use. If you encounter a poorly constructed website, you should look for alternative sources of information.

Questions you could ask yourself include:

- Does the website have a fancy 'bells and whistles' design that your computer can't accommodate or that simply doesn't work?
- Is the website difficult to navigate?
- Is the font too small to read, or is reading the text difficult because of a poorly chosen colour scheme?
- Are the articles badly written? For example, do the articles fail to explain the information in a logical and easy-to-understand way?
- Does the content rely too much on jargon?
- Are acronyms and jargon left unexplained?
- Does the content rely too much on jargon?
- Are acronyms and jargon left unexplained?
- Does the website redirect you to another site that you didn't intend to visit?
- Do advertising banners constantly obscure the text?

Think about questions to ask your doctor

Using the internet to get better informed about your medical condition can help you decide what questions to ask your doctor. However, it is not a substitute for obtaining high-quality and reliable information from your doctor. Always see a doctor for diagnosis and treatment advice.

It is a good idea to discuss online health information you have found with your doctor or other healthcare professional. However, don't expect them to have enough time to read multiple pages of information.

Before you visit the doctor, you should:

- Summarise the information you found on the internet.
- Think about what you have learned and what concerns you have.
- Prepare a short list of specific questions to ask your doctor.

Where to get help

- Your doctor
- Other healthcare professionals
- Consumers Health Forum of Australia Tel. (02) 6273 5444

Things to remember

- Online health consumers should be wary because medical misinformation or 'cyberquackery' is rife.
- Make sure the website is owned by a reputable organisation before you decide to trust its content.
- Don't use online health information to self-diagnose – always see your doctor.

References

Send us your feedback

- Rate this website
- Your comments
- Questions
- Your details

1/4 How would you rate this website?

- ☐ Excellent
- ☐ Good
- ☐ Average
- ☐ Fair
- ☐ Poor

Next  Submit Now  Cancel

Send us your feedback

- Rate this website
- Your comments
- Questions
- Your details

Please note that we cannot answer personal medical queries. If you are looking for health or medical advice we recommend that you:

- talk to your doctor or pharmacist
- dial triple zero (000) in an emergency
- ring NURSE-ON-CALL Tel. 1300 60 60 24.

2/4 Your Comments

Tell us who you are: Select an option

Enter your comments below (optional)

Next  Submit Now  Cancel

Send us your feedback

- Rate this website
- Your comments
- Questions
- Your details

3/4 Questions

What are you here to do? Looking for information on

Did you find what you were looking for?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Next  Submit Now  Cancel

Send us your feedback

- Rate this website
- Your comments
- Questions
- Your details

4/4 Your details

Postcode

Email Address

Submit Now  Cancel
Thank you. Your feedback has been successfully sent.

More information

Environmental health

The following content is displayed as Tabs. Once you have activated a link navigate to the end of the list to view its associated content. The activated link is defined as Active Tab

- Environmental health basics
- House and garden
- Chemical and metal pollutants
- Air and water quality
- Food quality and safety
- Technology and man-made risks
- Bushfires, floods and extreme weather
- Climate change
- Public health and disease control

Environmental health basics

- After a flood – animal and insect related hazards
  
  When returning to a flood-affected area, remember that wild animals, including rats, mice, snakes or spiders, may be trapped in your home, shed or garden...

- After a flood – returning home safely
  
  When returning to your home after a flood, take precautions to reduce the possibility of injury, illness or disease...

- Air pollution
  
  Around 75 per cent of Melbourne’s air pollution is caused by vehicle emissions...

- Allergies explained
  
  Allergy occurs when the body overreacts to a 'trigger' that is harmless to most people...

- Disease clusters
  
  Disease clusters are rare but can cause community concern about the possible effects of exposure to environmental hazards...

- Emergencies - floods
  
  You and your family should work out an emergency plan in case of flood...

- Food safety and storage
  
  High-risk food should be kept at 5 °C or below, and above 60 °C to avoid the temperature danger zone and food poisoning...

- Hazardous waste
  
  It can be dangerous to dispose of hazardous wastes through regular rubbish collections...

- Smoke and your health - science summary (video)
- Smoke and your health (video)

House and garden

- Asbestos and your health
  
  When asbestos fibres become airborne, people working with asbestos may inhale particles which remain in their lungs...

- Asbestos in the home
  
  Asbestos fibres breathed into the lungs can cause a range of health problems including lung cancer and mesothelioma...

- Bedbugs
  
  Bedbugs have highly developed mouth parts that can pierce skin...

- Edible gardens - saving water
  
  Saving water in the garden not only saves money, but also helps protect the environment...

- Gardening safety
  
  Gardening is an enjoyable form of exercise, but you need to take care...
• Gas heating - health and safety issues
  If you service your gas heater regularly and use it correctly, it will be safe and economical to use...

• Greywater - recycling water at home
  When handled properly, greywater can be safely reused for the garden...

• Hazardous waste
  It can be dangerous to dispose of hazardous wastes through regular rubbish collections...

• Mosquitoes - protect your home a checklist
  Use this simple checklist and take action to prevent mosquitoes from entering your home. The best protection from mosquito-borne diseases is to avoid mosquito bites...

• Mould and your health
  The way to control indoor mould growth is to control the source of moisture...

• Passive smoking
  Passive smoking means breathing other people's second-hand tobacco smoke. Passive smoking increases the risk of serious illness in both children and adults...

• Pest control in the home
  If you use pesticides to control pests around the house, make sure you use as little as possible...

• Pest control services
  If you have pest problems that you cannot manage yourself, you may need to hire an authorised pest control operator...

• Sewage overflows at home
  Sewage contains harmful microorganisms such as bacteria, viruses and protozoa...

• Wood fires and breathing problems
  The smoke from wood fires can affect air quality and may affect people's health...

Chemical and metal pollutants

• Hazardous waste
  It can be dangerous to dispose of hazardous wastes through regular rubbish collections...

• Arsenic mine tailings and health
  Mine tailings near goldmines may contain high levels of arsenic...

• Cadmium
  Low-level exposure to cadmium over a long period of time may cause health effects because cadmium can accumulate in the body...

• Chemicals and spray drift
  Sprayed chemicals can drift over neighbouring properties or water sources, and can affect human health, animals or the environment...

• Farm safety and handling agrichemicals
  To reduce risks on the farm, use hazardous chemicals according to manufacturer guidelines or replace them with less dangerous options...

• Lead exposure and your health
  Long-term exposure to low levels of lead may produce symptoms including irritability, lack of energy and loss of appetite...

• Look after your health at harvest time (slideshow)
  Farmer health, wellbeing and safety are often neglected when facing the pressures of harvest. Simple safety measures can dramatically reduce the risk of injury and illness...

• Mercury exposure and poisoning
  Preventing or minimising exposure to mercury in your environment is the best way to reduce the risk of mercury poisoning...

• Mercury in fish
  Pregnant women and young children should limit consumption of fish that contain high levels of mercury...

• Pest control in the home
If you use pesticides to control pests around the house, make sure you use as little as possible.

- **Pest control services**
  
  If you have pest problems that you cannot manage yourself, you may need to hire an authorised pest control operator.

### Air and water quality

- **Air pollution**
  
  Around 75 per cent of Melbourne's air pollution is caused by vehicle emissions.

- **Beaches and water quality**
  
  Water quality of natural water sources, such as beaches and rivers, can vary greatly. Keeping a lookout for poor water quality (such as water that is discoloured, murky or smells unpleasant) will help.

- **Cleaning up ash after a fire**
  
  After a fire, many homes may be affected by ash residue from smoke. This ash can be harmful, particularly for children or people with heart or lung conditions. This factsheet has tips and advice for.

- **Dental care - fluoride**
  
  Fluoride in your drinking water is like a constant 'repair kit' for your teeth.

- **Greywater - recycling water at home**
  
  When handled properly, greywater can be safely reused for the garden.

- **Groundwater**
  
  Groundwater quality varies across Victoria; in some areas, groundwater is not suitable for use.

- **Harmful algal blooms**
  
  Some types of blue-green algae produce toxins that can harm humans and animals when swallowed, inhaled or touched. People and pets should not enter the water at locations affected by blue-green algae.

- **Healthy swimming (video)**
  
  We can keep our pools safe, healthy, and most importantly fun.

- **Legionnaires' disease**
  
  Legionnaires' disease is a rare form of pneumonia.

- **Look after your health at harvest time (slideshow)**
  
  Farmer health, wellbeing and safety are often neglected when facing the pressures of harvest. Simple safety measures can dramatically reduce the risk of injury and illness.

- **Passive smoking**
  
  Passive smoking means breathing other people's second-hand tobacco smoke. Passive smoking increases the risk of serious illness in both children and adults.

- **Smoke and your health - protect your health (video)**
  
  Smoke and your health - science summary (video)

- **Swimming - keeping the water clean**
  
  There are simple steps for all visitors to follow to keep pool water clean for healthy swimming.

- **Water from natural resources**
  
  Drinking untreated water, such as creek water, bore water and sometimes even rainwater can lead to illnesses including gastroenteritis.

- **Water quality in tanks, bores and dams**
  
  Make sure your private drinking water supply is safe.

- **Wood fires and breathing problems**
  
  The smoke from wood fires can affect air quality and may affect people's health.

### Food quality and safety

- **Avoid food poisoning - Cook Safe (video)**
  
  Learn how to prepare and cook food safely at home.
Avoid food poisoning - Store Safe (video)  
Learn how to store food safely in your fridge at home.

Eggs  
The humble egg is a powerhouse of nutritional goodness. Eggs are full of things your body needs. They are a great source of protein, antioxidants, vitamins and minerals (such as vitamin A, vitamin D...)

Fishing - eat your catch with care  
People who fish in the Lower Yarra and Maribyrnong rivers need to be careful about eating their catch because of the risk of chemical exposure...

Food allergy and intolerance  
Food allergy is an immune response, while food intolerance is a chemical reaction...

Food - pesticides and other chemicals  
Chemicals such as pesticides, antibiotics and hormones are used to boost food production and ensure adequate food supply...

Food poisoning - prevention  
You can minimise the risk of food poisoning by taking simple precautions...

Food safety and storage  
High-risk food should be kept at 5 °C or below, and above 60 °C to avoid the temperature danger zone and food poisoning...

Travel health and safety tips (slide show)  
We all love travelling to new and exotic places, but unfortunately illnesses and unforeseen events can ruin the trip of a lifetime. With a little effort, take a few of these simple precautions to make...

Technology and man-made risks  

Asbestos and your health  
When asbestos fibres become airborne, people working with asbestos may inhale particles which remain in their lungs...

Cancer and asbestos  
Long-term exposure to asbestos is a cause of lung cancer and other serious illnesses...

Electromagnetic fields (EMF) and health issues  
The effect of electromagnetic fields (EMF) from power lines and other sources is a controversial issue...

Legionnaires' disease  
Legionnaires' disease is a rare form of pneumonia...

Mobile phones and your health  
Using a mobile phone while driving greatly increases the risk of traffic accidents...

Bushfires, floods and extreme weather  

After a flood – animal and insect related hazards  
When returning to a flood-affected area, remember that wild animals, including rats, mice, snakes or spiders, may be trapped in your home, shed or garden...

After a flood – returning home safely  
When returning to your home after a flood, take precautions to reduce the possibility of injury, illness or disease...

Bushfire aftermath - safety tips  
Houses, sheds and other buildings or structures burnt in a bushfire can leave potential health hazards...

Bushfire preparation advice  
Being prepared for a bushfire helps you cope better in an emergency...

Bushfires and water tanks  
Debris, smoke, ash and dead animals from a bushfire can contaminate water tanks...

Bushfire smoke  
Bushfire smoke can reduce air quality in rural and urban areas, and may affect people's health...

betterhealth.vic.gov.au
• **Cleaning up ash after a fire**

  After a fire, many homes may be affected by ash residue from smoke. This ash can be harmful, particularly for children or people with heart or lung conditions. This factsheet has tips and advice for...  

• **Emergencies - floods**

  You and your family should work out an emergency plan in case of flood...  

• **Extreme heat (video)**

  Extreme heat can affect anyone, including the young and healthy...  

• **Heat stress and heat-related illness**

  Heat kills more Australians than any natural disaster. Find out how you can treat and prevent heat-related illness...  

• **How to cope and stay safe in extreme heat**

  Know the effects of extreme heat, who is at risk and how you can prepare yourself and others...  

• **Mould and your health**

  The way to control indoor mould growth is to control the source of moisture...  

• **Sewage overflows at home**

  Sewage contains harmful microorganisms such as bacteria, viruses and protozoa...  

• **Smoke from planned burns**

  Bushfire smoke can reduce air quality in rural and urban areas, and may affect people’s health. Planned burns are an important part of reducing the risk of buildings...  

• **Survive the heat**

  How to cope and stay safe in extreme heat...  

---

**Climate change**

• **Beaches and water quality**

  Water quality of natural water sources, such as beaches and rivers, can vary greatly. Keeping a lookout for poor water quality (such as water that is discoloured, murky or smells unpleasant) will help...  

• **Climate change and health**

  The effects of climate change will have a serious impact on the physical and mental health of people around the world...  

• **Climate change - what you can do**

  There are many things you can do to tackle climate change and live a more sustainable lifestyle...  

• **Edible gardens - saving water**

  Saving water in the garden not only saves money, but also helps protect the environment...  

• **Urban flash floods - FAQs**

  Urban flash flooding can happen quickly and without warning. Heavy rain causes runoff to collect in dips, car parks and roads, and there is a risk of contamination, injury and disease...  

---

**Public health and disease control**

• **Disease clusters**

  Disease clusters are rare but can cause community concern about the possible effects of exposure to environmental hazards...  

• **Harmful algal blooms**

  Some types of blue-green algae produce toxins that can harm humans and animals when swallowed, inhaled or touched. People and pets should not enter the water at locations affected by blue-green algae...  

• **Healthy swimming (video)**

  We can keep our pools safe, healthy, and most importantly fun...  

• **Mosquitoes can carry diseases**

  You can reduce the risk of mosquito bites if you get rid of potential mosquito breeding sites around your home...
Mosquitoes - mozzie-proof your holiday a checklist
Use this simple checklist and take action to prevent mosquitoes from spoiling your holiday. Mosquitoes can carry diseases be prepared and avoid mosquito bites...

Mosquitoes - protect your home a checklist
Use this simple checklist and take action to prevent mosquitoes from entering your home. The best protection from mosquito-borne diseases is to avoid mosquito bites...

Needlestick injury
A needlestick injury means the skin is accidentally punctured by a used needle. Diseases that could be transmitted by a needle or needlestick injury include human immunodeficiency virus (HIV).

Travel health and safety tips (slide show)
We all love travelling to new and exotic places, but unfortunately illnesses and unforeseen events can ruin the trip of a lifetime. With a little effort, take a few of these simple precautions to make...

Related Information

Clinical trials
People who are deciding whether to enter a clinical trial must understand all the essential facts, benefits and risks...

Complementary medicines - tell your healthcare professionals
Tell your healthcare professionals about all medicines you take, including complementary medicines...

Medicine information leaflets for consumers
A Consumer Medicines Information (CMI) leaflet gives you accurate information about the safety of your medication and how best to take it...

Placebo effect
Belief in a treatment may be enough to change the course of a person's physical illness...

Medicinal cannabis
Medicinal cannabis is a legal, high quality medicine that can be prescribed for people by their doctor...

Home

Related information on other websites

Consumers Health Forum of Australia - Health websites.
Health On The Net Foundation - HON code.
National Prescribing Service Ltd. (Australia)
Pew Internet.

Content Partner
This page has been produced in consultation with and approved by: Department of Health and Human Services - RHF&R - Office of the Chief Health Officer

Last updated: March 2014

Page content currently being reviewed.

Content on this website is provided for information purposes only. Information about a therapy, service, product or treatment does not in any way endorse or support such therapy, service, product or treatment and is not intended to replace advice from your doctor or other registered health professional. The information and materials contained on this website are not intended to constitute a comprehensive guide concerning all aspects of the therapy, product or treatment described on the website. All users are urged to always seek advice from a registered health care professional for diagnosis and answers to their medical questions and to ascertain whether the particular therapy, service, product or treatment described on the website is suitable in their circumstances. The State of Victoria and the Department of Health & Human Services shall not bear any liability for reliance by any user on the materials contained on this website.
NURSE-ON-CALL

Provides immediate, expert health advice from a registered nurse. Call 1300 60 60 24

Service Search

Find services near you

Service: Select a service
Location:

Type a minimum of three characters then press UP or DOWN on the keyboard to navigate the autocompleted search results

Use my location
Find a service

Recent Activity

12 people have watched a video today

- **Health topics**
  - Conditions and treatments
  - Healthy living
  - Services and support

- **Explore**
  - Recipes
  - Healthy pantry
  - Videos
  - Consumer medicine information
  - Multilingual health information - Health Translations Directory

- **About**
  - About us
  - Accessibility
  - Content partners
  - Privacy
  - Terms of use
  - Contact us

- **Connect with us**
  - Facebook
  - Twitter
  - YouTube

Page last reviewed: 30 Mar 2014


  - Privacy Statement
  - Copyright Notice

betterhealth.vic.gov.au
Disclaimer Notice

This web site is managed and authorised by the Department of Health & Human Services, State Government of Victoria, Australia

© Copyright State of Victoria 2018.

This page has been produced in consultation with and approved by:

Department of Health and Human Services - RHP&R - Office of the Chief Health Officer

Content on this website is provided for information purposes only. Information about a therapy, service, product or treatment does not in any way endorse or support such therapy, service, product or treatment and is not intended to replace advice from your doctor or other registered health professional. The information and materials contained on this website are not intended to constitute a comprehensive guide concerning all aspects of the therapy, product or treatment described on the website. All users are urged to always seek advice from a registered health care professional for diagnosis and answers to their medical questions and to ascertain whether the particular therapy, service, product or treatment described on the website is suitable in their circumstances. The State of Victoria and the Department of Health & Human Services shall not bear any liability for reliance by any user on the materials contained on this website.

For the latest updates and more information, visit www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au