



# Food & health

## Poor NHS choice

### HEALTHCARE

A year on from roll-out of the NHS choose-and-book scheme, many people are unaware that they can select a hospital for treatment.

A GP in England should offer a choice of at least four hospital clinics as well as advice on making decisions and booking appointments, but there are no plans to introduce similar schemes in Northern Ireland, Wales or Scotland.

A Mori survey showed that only 30 per cent of patients recalled being offered a choice of hospital for their first appointment. There are also differences across the country – 74 per cent were offered a choice in one area but only 7 per cent in another.

And hospitals are to be given the right to advertise their facilities, to attract patients and doctors' recommendations. While we welcome accurate adverts that help patients make the right choices, safeguards are needed to ensure that advertising does provide useful information and doesn't take resources from clinical services.

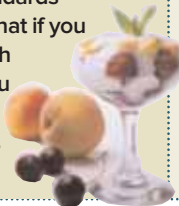
Hospitals' performance ratings can be found at [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk).

## 5 tips to deal with cholesterol and reduce the risk of coronary heart disease

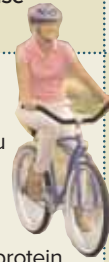


**1** Try to eat the right sort of fat. Monounsaturated fats, which can be found in avocados, oily fish, nuts and olive oil, help reduce cholesterol levels, so be sure to include these in your diet. In turn, avoid butter, fatty cuts of meat, cakes and biscuits, as these contain saturated fats that raise cholesterol levels.

**3** There is evidence that plant sterols and stanols help lower cholesterol levels. These are added to certain spreads and yogurts, but you can reduce cholesterol without relying on such foods. The Food Standards Agency says that if you don't have high cholesterol you shouldn't eat these products too often.



**4** Build good cholesterol, by finding an activity you like. Cholesterol moves around the body in two forms of lipoproteins (fat and protein compounds). High-density lipoproteins (HDL), which increase through exercise, remove extra cholesterol from the bloodstream. Avoid low-density lipoproteins (LDL) that clog up arteries.



**2** Fibre can reduce the cholesterol absorbed from your intestine into the bloodstream, so eat oats and pulses, as well as fruit and vegetables that also contain antioxidants, which may help stop cholesterol sticking to coronary artery walls. There is no evidence that vitamin tablets have the same effect.



**5** If you are worried, get tested by your GP. This is crucial if a parent had a heart attack at an early age. Statins are drugs used to lower cholesterol. Some are available over the counter, but if you are considering trying statins, you should chat to your GP first to identify what might be the best approach for you.



Angela calls on creativity at wintertime

Top chef Angela Hartnett tells us her best bites for the new year

## Pick parsnips and pumpkins

### CHEF'S CHOICE

The new year doesn't provide us with the widest of choices when it comes to seasonal food, but there's plenty on offer if you think creatively.

There are some fantastic vegetables around at the moment – parsnips, pumpkin and cauliflower are all great to cook with. And you can be inventive with your ingredients.

At the Connaught Hotel restaurant – part of Gordon Ramsay's group – we make a

beautiful pumpkin tortellini with crushed amaretto biscuits on top that really works well.

Game is also in season – I often put wild venison on the menu at this time of year. I use loin and simply roast it and serve with a chestnut and cranberry compote.

And hare is good, too, although it has a very strong, gamey taste. You'd probably need to order wild hare from a butcher you trust, rather than looking for it in the supermarket.

It's easy for chefs to become lazy and just order ingredients that

have to be flown in, but it's ludicrous, for example, to have strawberries or raspberries on the menu in wintertime.

If you're trying to shop seasonally, go to markets or shops where you can ask the sellers where their food has come from.

You can judge whether something is in season or not by looking at the price. If in January you compare the price of peaches and apples, you'll realise peaches are so much more expensive because they are out of season here and it costs a lot to get hold of them.



**20%**  
of adults exceed recommended  
levels of saturated fat consumption  
BRITISH HEART FOUNDATION



**2.9 billion**  
the number of times we ate  
fresh carrots last year  
THE GROCER

## News in brief

### Herbal medicine

Registration of over-the-counter herbal medicines has begun, so look out for PL (product licence) numbers in shops. Be warned, though, it will take years to consider applications – traditional herbal medicines should have a THR number already. The Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency says only safe, effective and established products will be registered, and patient information will improve, but scientists and doctors want higher standards for compliance.



### Hospital food

Our hospital food report in November sparked a House of Lords debate, with Baroness Neuberger asking how the government will improve hospital meals. We'll keep you updated on progress of our work.

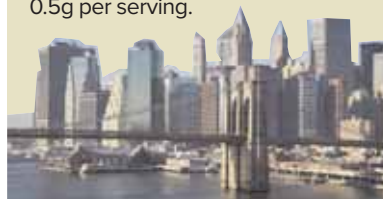
### Botox botches

Doctors have warned people about Botox injections after four Americans had potentially fatal doses. Concerns continue in the UK over delays in regulating this part of the cosmetic industry. Not only is there widespread illegal advertising, Botox is also often administered by unqualified staff.



### Trans fat ban

New York City's health department is getting tough on artery-clogging trans fat. Under plans, eateries will have to limit trans fat to less than 0.5g per serving.



Taste could affect whether you choose wild or farmed meat

# Game on for venison

## FLAVOUR OF THE MONTH

**T**hanks to a booming deer population, you don't need to be royalty these days to get your hands on meat that's rich in iron and protein, contains less fat than other red meats and even compares favourably nutritionally to chicken.

Wild venison – which comes from winter culls to control the population – is increasingly available in butchers, markets and online, and is less expensive than you may think. Supermarkets tend not to sell it but it can be found in Morrisons.

Six species of deer roam the UK but only red and roe deer are truly native. Wild venison is usually from red deer and is said to have a strong gamey taste.

According to Peter Watson, Director of the Deer Initiative – which advises on wild deer management – packaging won't always tell you the species of deer your wild venison came from. Peter says that if you're after a particular type, such as the milder-tasting fallow deer, ask your butcher or game dealer (see [www.gametoeat.co.uk](http://www.gametoeat.co.uk)).

EU food hygiene regulations require that wild venison is supplied by trained stalkers, who can ensure the meat is safe to eat.



Venison has fewer calories and less fat than other red meats

**Wild venison is less expensive than you may think**

Farmed venison is available all year and preferred by major retailers, although it's usually more expensive than wild meat.

Most farmed venison also comes from red deer but, farmers say, it doesn't have the rich gamey taste of wild counterparts.

Large supermarkets should stock it, as well as butchers and farm shops. Look out for the Quality Assured Farmed Venison logo – it guarantees high rearing standards and a traceable source.

While some farmers produce organic venison, this isn't an option with wild deer, as you can't control where they go or what they eat. It is, of course, free range.

## Your say

Butcher Ray Smith runs the 'Venison in a day' course at Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall's River Cottage in Dorset. He says: 'Wild venison is a lovely meat if it's been shot, bled and butchered properly. If it's not, that's when people say that they find it too strong or gamey. I try to show people how it should be treated. We start the day with two locally shot deer, skin them



and prepare different cuts, sausages and salami. Then we cook some of it for lunch. There's lots of hands-on

participation. People don't seem to be that squeamish – I think they quite enjoy finding out where their meat comes from rather than it just turning up on their plate.'

The next course is on 22 January. For details see [www.rivercottage.net](http://www.rivercottage.net).

**In April we will look at rhubarb. Send us your top tips. Email Julie Lennard at [helpwanted@which.co.uk](mailto:helpwanted@which.co.uk)**