



# YOUR HEALTH

*Got a medical problem or need health advice? Ask Dr Rosemary Leonard*

**Q** After a slight abnormality on some routine blood tests, my GP arranged for me to have a scan, which showed I have a fatty liver. What exactly does this mean? I have wine with my evening meal, but have never considered myself a heavy drinker.

**A** The most common cause for excess fat in the liver is drinking too much alcohol. You may not think you're drinking much, but if you're having a couple of large glasses every evening, you're probably getting through around 30 units a week, which is double the recommended amount for a woman.

A fatty liver in itself is not harmful, but it is an indicator that unless you cut down on alcohol, you are at risk from permanent liver damage. Long-term habits can be difficult to break, but try to go without alcohol most days, and make that evening glass with your meal a treat rather than a daily habit.



## REPORTING SIDE EFFECTS FROM NEW DRUGS

Have you, or one of your family recently been given one of the new swine flu vaccines, and had a nasty side effect? Or have you had side effects from other new medicines? Accurate information about all new drugs can only be obtained if as many people as possible report any problems they have, regardless of whether they are mild or serious. You can report side effects to your doctor, but, better still, do it online at [www.mhra.gov.uk/safetyinformation](http://www.mhra.gov.uk/safetyinformation).

## NEW IN YOUR CHEMIST... support for carers

Three out of five people will become a carer at some point in their life, looking after someone who is disabled, frail or ill. For many, it's a round-the-clock job that can be draining and make you feel socially isolated. Boots has now launched a new free service for carers, designed to help them look after themselves as well as those in their care. Caring Made Easier packs are available in large stores and can also be ordered from all stores nationwide. In addition, anyone over 60 is entitled to free membership of the Boots Health Club, which gives a ten per cent discount on all Boots brands. For more info, see [bootswebmd.com/caring](http://bootswebmd.com/caring).

## What's the ALTERNATIVE... for GOUT?

Gout is triggered by uric acid crystals forming inside the joints, leading to severe inflammation and pain. The underlying cause is a high level of uric acid in the bloodstream and, though genes can play a part, a diet high in red meat and alcohol can also be to blame. Research done at the University of

California has shown that Montmorency cherries can help reduce uric acid levels, and can also help alleviate inflammation and pain in an affected joint. Cherry juice is also high in antioxidants, and may offer some protection against heart disease. Try Montmorency Cherrygood juice, £1.39, from most supermarkets.

**Q** I have had an irritable bowel for years, but recent financial worries mean I'm now always bloated. My doctor advised me to eat more fibre, but it seems to have made it worse. Any suggestions?



**A** There are two types of fibre. Insoluble fibre (found in wholewheat bread and cereals) is good for treating constipation, but can make irritable bowel syndrome worse. Soluble fibre (found in oats and pulses) can be partially digested and is much kinder for an irritable bowel. Try switching to porridge for breakfast, and only have small portions of fruit and veg. Soluble fibre supplements are also available from chemists. Chocolate, caffeine and fatty foods can also make IBS worse, and are best avoided. Exercise and time for relaxation can reduce stress, which should also ease bowel spasms, but if symptoms persist, counselling may be helpful. **w&h**