Internet Medical Information

Medical information on the Internet

Millions of people look for health information on the Internet. Some of the health information on the Internet is reliable and up to date. Some is not. Many websites are useful, but others may present information that is inaccurate or misleading.

When you visit a site for the first time, it is important to figure out how reliable it is. How can you tell whether a source of health information on the Internet is trustworthy? This short guide outlines things to consider in your evaluation.

CONSIDER THE SOURCE.

If you use the Internet on a particular website, look for an "about us" page. Check to see who runs the site:

- Is it a branch of the government, a university, a health organization, a hospital or a business?
- Does the site have an editorial board? Is the information reviewed before it is posted?
- If the website is a business, what are they trying to sell you? Could that influence what they say about a particular health problem?

- Keep a questioning and skeptical attitude towards health information until you are confident in the source. Things that sound too good to be true often are.
- To protect your health and safety, you need current, unbiased information based on research.
- World Wide Web search engines such as Google can be used to find information about medical questions. Some websites are designed to provide expert medical information.

SOME GOOD FREE SITES ARE:

www.healthfinder.gov
www.noah-health.org
www.merckmedicus.com
www.familydoctor.org
www.cdc.gov
www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/healthtopics
www.wrongdiagnosis.com
www.healthcentral.com
www.righthealth.com
www.qualityhealth.com
www.wellsphere.com
www.intellihealth.com
www.pubmed.gov
www.medmatrix.org
www.mayoclinic.com
www.webmd.com
www.medicinenet.com
www.drugs.com
www.healthgrades.com
www.rxlist.com
www.healthline.com
www.revolutionhealth.com

Most medical information from these sites is very good. Always check with your caregiver about information. Ask questions about what you have learned. You can also check different sources. This way you can see if they all agree on what you found.

IMPORTANT CONSIDERATIONS ABOUT HEALTH WEBSITES INCLUDE:

- Web addresses ending in ".gov" indicate that it is a government sponsored site.
- Web addresses ending in ".edu" indicates an educational institution.
- Web addresses ending in ".org" a noncommercial organization.
- Web addresses ending in ".com" a commercial organization.
- In addition to identifying who wrote the material you are reading, the site should describe the evidence (such as articles in medical journals) that the material is based on.
- Opinions or advice should be clearly set apart from information that is "evidence-based" (that is, based on research results).
- If a site discusses health benefits people can expect from treatment, look for references to scientific research

that clearly supports what is said.

- Remember that testimonials, anecdotes, unsupported claims, and opinions are not the same as objective, evidence-based information.
- Websites should be reviewed and updated on a regular basis in order to remain current with the latest medical science. Outdated content can be misleading or even dangerous. The most recent update or review date should be clearly posted.

PERSONAL HEALTH INFORMATION:

- Websites often track visitors' paths to determine what pages are being viewed. A health website may ask you to "subscribe" or "become a member." In some cases, this may be so that it can collect a user fee or select information for you that is relevant to your questions. In all cases, this will give the site personal information about you. Credible sites asking for this kind of information should tell you exactly what may done with it.
- Be sure to read any privacy policy on the site**. Don't sign up for anything that you do not fully understand.**
- E-mail messages from websites should be carefully evaluated. The origin of the message and its purpose should be considered.
- Websites should make it easy for people to learn who is responsible for the site and its information. Who runs the site? On the National Institutes of Health (NIH) website, for example, each page clearly identifies NIH and includes a link to the site's homepage.
- If the person or organization in charge of the website did not write the material, the original source should be clearly listed.
- Health-related websites should provide information about the healthcare or medical credentials of the people who prepare or review the material on the site.

DO NOT USE THE INFORMATION YOU FIND ON THE INTERNET TO TRY TO DIAGNOSE OR TREAT YOURSELF. Print out information of specific interest or concern and bring it with you to your next appointment. Your caregiver will help assess the information and how appropriate it is for you.

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