

# Drug and Health Information: What makes health information “good”? Where can I find it?

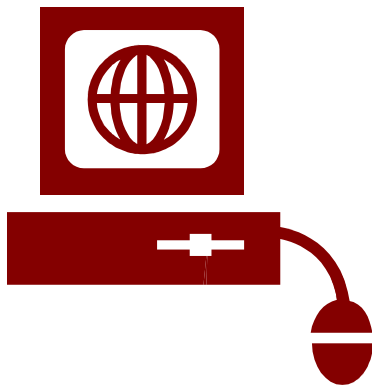
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Consumers today have access to many sources of health care and medication information.

- In addition to information from your doctor and government health organizations, consumers also receive health information through radio and television and, increasingly, the Internet
- How does one decide which information sources to use?

## 10 Things To Know About Evaluating Medical Resources on the Web<sup>1</sup>



The Internet provides access to an ever-greater body of information. The number of Web sites offering health-related resources grows every day.

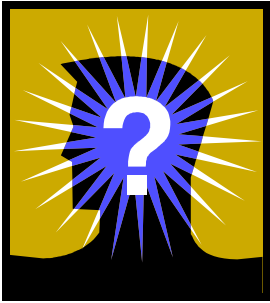
- Many sites provide valuable information
- Others may have information that is unreliable or misleading

This short guide contains important questions you should consider as you look for health information online. Answering these questions when you visit a new site will help you evaluate the information you find.

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<sup>1</sup> NCCAM Publication No. D142 <http://nccam.nih.gov/health/webresources/>, created February 19, 2002, accessed August 7, 2006

## 1. Who runs this site?



Any good health-related Web site should make it easy for you to learn who created and maintains its information. You should only trust information provided by organizations you know and trust, like your hospital or state and local departments of health.

## 2. Who pays for the site?

It costs money to run a Web site. The source of a Web site's funding should be clearly stated. For example,

- Web addresses ending in ".gov" denote a Federal Government-sponsored site.
- You should know how the site pays for its existence. Does it sell advertising? Is it sponsored by a drug company?



The source of funding can affect what content is presented, how the content is presented, and what the site owners want to accomplish on the site.

- Beware of sites that may give false information in order to sell you a product.

## 3. What is the purpose of the site?

This question is related to who runs and pays for the site. An "About This Site" link appears on many sites; if it's there, use it. The purpose of the site should be clearly stated and should help you evaluate the trustworthiness of the information.



#### **4. Where does the information come from?**

Many health/medical sites post information collected from other Web sites or sources. If the person or organization in charge of the site did not create the information, the original source should be clearly labeled.

#### **5. What is the basis of the information?**



In addition to identifying who wrote the material you are reading, the site should describe the evidence that the material is based on. Medical facts and figures should have references (such as to articles in medical journals). Beware of unverifiable "expert opinion" or "customer testimonials."

#### **6. How is the information selected?**

Is there an editorial board? Do people with excellent professional and scientific qualifications review the material before it is posted?

#### **7. How current is the information?**

Web sites should be reviewed and updated on a regular basis. Medical information should especially be current. The most recent update or review date should be clearly posted. Even if the information has not changed, you want to know whether the site owners have reviewed it recently to ensure that it is still valid.



## 8. How does the site choose links to other sites?



Web sites should have a policy about how they link to other sites. Some medical sites don't link to any other sites. Others only link to sites that have met certain criteria. Some link to any site that asks, or pays, for a link. Exercise caution when following a link to a commercial site.

## 9. What information about you does the site collect and why?

Web sites routinely track visitors to determine what pages are being used. Some sites ask for you to "subscribe" or "become a member." This may be to collect a user fee or to push information to you based on your concerns. In either case, this gives the site personal information about you.

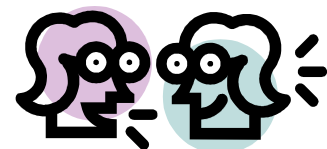
- Be certain to read and understand the site's privacy policy
- Don't sign up for anything that you are not sure you fully understand
- Don't give "personally identifying" information such as name, birth date, social security number



In general, you should not have to give out your personal information in order to get good health information from the site.

## 10. How does the site manage interactions with visitors?

There should always be a way for you to contact the site owner if you have problems or questions. If the site hosts online discussion areas, it should describe the terms of using this service. Again, be careful of the information you provide about yourself in these areas.



## Health Information on the Internet: Where do I begin?

The following Web sites are good places to start when gathering health information on the Internet.

- They are all maintained by federal government health organizations
- The information provided is free



As always, it is important to discuss any new information with your doctor or other health care provider.

### MedlinePlus

(<http://medlineplus.gov/>)

Maintained by the National Library of Medicine, this site provides access to hundreds of health topics and links you to pre-screened sites offering health information.

### MedlinePlus:

**Drugs, Supplements, and Herbal Information**  
(<http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/druginformation.html>)

A section of the general MedlinePlus page, listed above, this site provides detailed information on prescription medications, over-the-counter medications, and vitamin, herbal and mineral supplements.



*The information contained in this handout is for educational purposes only. It is not intended to be used as a replacement for discussion with your health care provider. Speak with your doctor for any specific medical concerns. Always check with your doctor before making any changes with your medication therapy or lifestyle.*