



## **Finding Health Information on the Internet**

The Internet can be a good source of useful health information. However, not all you see on the Internet is correct. These questions can help you decide if you can trust the information you find online.

### **What is the purpose of the website?**

Some websites have information called “about this site”. Sometimes you have to figure out the purpose on your own. By comparing how health information is presented on different websites, you can soon learn how to tell if it is based on research, or a personal opinion, or promoting a particular product or treatment.

Be a critical viewer. Some ads for health remedies are designed to look like general information about health conditions. An ad on a website should be identified as one.

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

The source of the information should be clear. Check for references to original sources like books, research studies and other professional publications.

Be aware that owner or sponsor of a website controls the information on it and its purpose. The last part of a web address can help you learn who owns or sponsors it:

- *.gov* = government
- *.edu* = public or private schools
- *.org* = non-profit organization
- *.com* = commercial business

### **Is the information complete?**

For health conditions, it should explain:

- the causes
- how to prevent it
- how to recognize it
- how it is diagnosed
- choices about treatments and procedures (and alternatives)
- what you can expect after treatment

Does it include links to other reputable sites and sources? The information on reliable health websites is often peer-reviewed (approved by health experts for accuracy) before it is posted.

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

Health information should be current and updated regularly to include recent research or news. The date of the last review or update should be on the web page or any linked document. The information on reliable websites is often peer-reviewed (approved by health experts for accuracy) before it is posted.

### **What about information from social media websites?**

The purpose of social media websites is for people to share information to read or watch. They offer ways to connect with others by sharing feedback and comments online.

Some examples are:

**Blogs:** websites that features news or personal opinions from an individual person, organization, or company. Viewers can usually interact by sharing their comments.

**Facebook™:** a website that allows people, companies and organizations to share information and personal or professional updates about themselves.

**YouTube™:** a website where people, companies and organizations can share videos for the public to watch.

While social media networks can help connect people to share health information and experiences, viewers always need to think critically about the information and its source.

Whatever the source, it's a good idea for you to discuss any information you find online with a trusted healthcare provider.

**IMPORTANT NOTE:** Never use information from the Internet to diagnose or treat a health problem by yourself or to replace a visit to a professional healthcare provider.

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