

Thanks to the internet, we have more access to health information than ever before. But, knowing what is real and reliable is essential for making smart choices about our health, whether it is managing a diagnosis or just living healthier. Accurate information helps you take control and work better with your healthcare team.

Unfortunately, there's a lot of health information online that simply isn't true. Believing this can lead to bad decisions, like delaying needed treatment, trying unsafe remedies, and not trusting good medical advice.

Because there's so much out there, we want to give you some easy tools you can use right now to decide if the health information you see online is reliable and safe to follow.

## EASY STEPS TO CHECK HEALTH INFORMATION

- **Check who is sharing the Information:** Websites that end in .gov (like government health sites), .edu (like university health centers), and .org (like non-profit health groups) are often good places to start. They usually have to follow strict rules to make sure the information they share is correct.
- **Be careful with personal blogs and social media:** Your friend's blog or a random post on social media might share their own experiences, but it's not the same as expert medical advice. Personal blogs are great for connecting with others and helping you feel supported but are not the place to look for trusted medical advice.
- **Look for well-known medical institutions:** Places like the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), the World Health Organization (WHO), and reputable hospitals like Mayo Clinic or Cleveland Clinic have teams of experts who make sure the information they share is based on solid science.
- **It's also a good idea to seek out information from non-profit health groups:** Organizations like American Cancer Society or American Heart Association focus on specific health issues and provide accurate information and support.



## LOOK FOR PROOF AND FACTS



- **Does the site share where they got their information (like scientific studies or medical experts?):** Credible health information should be supported by scientific research. Look for citations, references to peer-reviewed studies, or quotes from qualified healthcare professionals.
- **Don't fall for stories that sound amazing but have no proof:** Watch out for claims of "miracle cures" or things that sound too good to be true. Real medical breakthroughs take time and research.
- **Is the info checked by health professionals?:** Credible health websites have editorial boards or advisory panels that review content to ensure it's accurate.
- **Keep an eye out for ads or products being promoted:** If a website is trying hard to sell you something, the health information they give might be biased to make their product look good. Be aware of websites selling health-related products that may downplay risks or exaggerate benefits.
- **Be doubtful of claims that seem way too good to be true:** If a health claim seems unbelievable or offers a simple solution to a complex health problem, it likely is. Real health solutions usually involve effort and aren't instant.
- **Look for balanced information, not just one side of an issue:** Reputable sources will often present a balanced view of different treatment options, potential risks, and uncertainties, rather than promoting a single approach.



### WHEN WAS THIS INFORMATION SHARED?

Health information changes over time, so look for recent updates. What medical professionals knew even a few years ago might be different now. Make sure the information you're reading is current. Trustworthy sites will publish the date the information was published or last changed.

### COMPARE WHAT OTHER RELIABLE SOURCES ARE SAYING

- **Double-check facts with other trustworthy websites:** Don't just believe one website or what you see on social media. It's always a good idea to get information from multiple reliable places.
- **Consider asking your healthcare provider if a source is reputable.** Before taking any action, make a note and ask your healthcare team at your next appointment or via your patient portal.

### RED FLAGS TO WATCH FOR

- **Exaggerated language (like "secret cure"):** Websites that use really dramatic words to grab your attention might not be telling the whole truth. Legitimate health information is usually presented clearly and objectively.
- **Lack of references or links to studies:** If they make big claims but don't say where they got their information, be suspicious.
- **Lots of personal stories instead of real facts:** While personal stories can be helpful for support, they're not scientific proof that something works for everyone.
- **Pushing you hard to buy something:** If a website is trying to scare you into buying their product or service, the health info might be misleading.
- **Claims that go against what trusted health organizations say:** If a website says something completely different from what the CDC, WHO, or other major health organizations recommend, it's a big red flag.

**Remember to talk to your provider for personal medical advice. What you find online is helpful, but it's not the same as getting advice from a medical provider who knows your specific health situation.**

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