

## TIP SHEET

## FINDING QUALITY HEALTH INFORMATION ONLINE

The Internet has opened a world of medical information to consumers increasingly interested in learning about various health conditions and how to stay healthy. In fact, two in three adults now report looking online for this kind of information.

As more and more Americans turn to the Internet for health information, it's important to remember not all web sites are created equal. Some may contain false or misleading information.

Here are some helpful tips to consider:

- 1. Know the source.** Begin your search with a reliable, credible source. Any good web site should clearly state who maintains the site and its content. For example, the American Pain Foundation (APF) logo appears on every major page on its web site, along with a link to the home page. The end of web addresses can also help you determine the type of site you're on.
  - .gov – U.S. government-sponsored sites
  - .org – non-profit organizations
  - .edu – educational institutions
  - .com – commercial sitesLook at who is funding the site. Non-profits can be supported by many sources, including pharmaceutical and insurance companies, but that support and sponsorship should be clearly stated. This is often found in the "About Us" section of the web site.
- 2. Check out the "About Us" link.** Learn about the purpose of the organization and to help determine whether it's a trusted source. For example, is the purpose of the site to provide information or to sell a product? Proceed with caution if this information doesn't exist.
- 3. Fact or opinion?** Make sure the information presented is based on facts and credible medical research, not opinion. Is the information reviewed by experts who specialize in the topic of interest? If a site presents information collected from other web sites or sources, the original source should be cited.
- 4. Get a second (and third) opinion.** Compare information from several credible sites and verify what you find on the Internet with other reliable sources (for example, a medical textbook and, most importantly, advice from your healthcare team).
- 5. Make sure it's up-to-date.** How current is the information? Does it reflect the latest research and treatment options? If it isn't clear how recently information has been updated or reviewed, move on to another source.
- 6. Look for links.** Once you've determined that the site is trustworthy, look at the resource or links page to find other quality sources of information. If you click on a link within a site, you will be taken to an entirely new site, so be sure to evaluate it as well.



**REMEMBER: Never use information found on the Internet to make decisions about your medical care. Use your online research to educate yourself and be a more informed partner when working with your healthcare provider to determine the best treatment for you.**

7. **Pause before giving personal information.** Some sites will ask visitors to register before accessing certain sections of the site. Review the privacy policy. If the site asks you to sign up or become a member, make sure the hosting organization will not share your information with third parties.
8. **Sound too good to be true?** Steer clear of sites that make health claims that sound too good to be true or promote “miracle” or “breakthrough” cures. If it sounds too good to be true, it generally is!
9. **Advertisements should be clearly separate from content.** Advertisements should be labeled as such, read “From our Sponsor” or include a logo.
10. **A web contact should be provided.** Quality web sites always provide a way for visitors to submit questions, give feedback or report problems.

Another good rule of thumb? Look for the Health on the Net (HON) logo (usually found at the bottom of the web pages). The HONcode was created to help evaluate and improve the quality of information on the Internet for both patients and medical professionals.

Sources: National Library of Medicine, National Cancer Institute, AARP, Pew Internet & American Life Project

## DON'T HAVE A COMPUTER OR ACCESS TO THE INTERNET AT HOME?

Most libraries, public universities and senior centers now have computers that you can use to access the Internet. Many now hold tutorials about how to start your search. You may also consider asking a trusted family member or friend to do the search for you.



## CREDIBLE HEALTH WEB SITES

Below are some trustworthy web sites to help get you started.

### Familydoctor.org

This web site is offered to consumers by the American Academy of Family Physicians and features clear and concise patient handouts for common medical concerns and conditions.  
<http://familydoctor.org>

### HealthCentral

HealthCentral provides a collection of web sites providing trusted medical information from doctors, researchers and expert patients, as well as news, information, video and other multi-media content on health related subjects.  
[www.healthcentral.com](http://www.healthcentral.com)

### Mayo Clinic

Mayo Clinic provides health information and tools that reflect the expertise of Mayo's 3,400 physicians and scientists.  
[www.mayoclinic.com](http://www.mayoclinic.com)

### MedicineNet

MedicineNet.com is an online, healthcare media publishing company. It is part of the WebMD Network and provides comprehensive, easy-to-read, in-depth medical information for people who want to research a variety of medical and health subjects.  
[www.medicinenet.com](http://www.medicinenet.com)

### Medline Plus

The National Library of Medicine consumer web site brings together the latest health news, studies from the National Institutes of Health, interactive tutorials, an illustrated medical encyclopedia and much more.  
[www.medlineplus.gov](http://www.medlineplus.gov)

### WebMD

Provides valuable health information, tools for managing your health and support to those who seek information.  
[www.webmd.com](http://www.webmd.com)

APF's web site is chock full of helpful resources and information about pain, its management and the multitude of issues faced by people living with pain. Visit [www.painfoundation.org](http://www.painfoundation.org) today to *learn* about your or a loved one's pain condition, *connect* with others and *take action* for improved pain care for all.