

Using the Internet to Find Information About Your Health



Information for patients and families

Read this booklet to help you:

- use the internet to learn about health
- decide if you can trust the health information on a webpage
- protect your privacy when using the internet
- learn more about where to find quality health information



Health information on the internet

Many people use the internet to find health information for themselves, family or friends. There is a lot of good quality health information online. But, be careful not to trust everything you read.

Information found online may at times be outdated or incorrect. An organization may not keep their information up to date. A website may post information that is not based on any scientific research. Some websites may try to convince you to buy a product or service.

Having the skills to find good quality health information on your own can help you improve your health literacy. It can help you take better care of yourself and prepare you for discussions with your health care team.

Health literacy means using different skills to get, understand, communicate and use information so you can make good decisions about your health.



Remember: Don't act on any information you find online without first talking with your health care provider. They will know the most about your specific health questions.

How do I get started?

Use your search engine (for example Google or Bing) to get started. In a search box, type keywords rather than sentences to get better results.

Browse through your search results for websites that were created by an organization or educational institution that is well-known, reliable and you have heard of. They may include:

- hospitals
- universities
- government agencies
- national organizations

These reliable websites may not be the first to appear on your list of results, so you may need to scroll down or navigate to the next page to find them.

Examples of reliable websites to get you started:

University Health Network (UHN) Health Information

Website: www.uhnpatienteducation.ca

Health Canada

Website: www.hc-sc.gc.ca

Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care

Website: www.health.gov.on.ca

MedlinePlus from the National Library of Medicine

Website: www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus

National Institutes of Health

Website: www.nih.gov

Mayo Clinic

Website: www.mayoclinic.org

How do I know if I can trust the health information I find?

This checklist can help you to decide if a website has good quality health information:

- ✓ **The name of the organization is easy to find.**
It is clear to you who owns or hosts the information and the website. The owner or host is linked to a government organization, university, hospital, or well-known society (for example: Canadian Cancer Society, Arthritis Society, and Heart and Stroke Foundation).
- ✓ **Contact information is available.** You can find a phone number, email address and/or mailing address on the site if you want to contact the owners for more information or provide feedback.
- ✓ **The author or editors of the information are qualified health care professionals.** You can easily find the name, education and experience of the person who wrote or edited the information. An editorial board has reviewed the information. The information is up to date and based on scientific evidence, not just opinion.
- ✓ **The website is up to date and updated often.** There is a date at the bottom of the page or article when the information was written or last reviewed and updated.
- ✓ **The website considers your privacy.** The website has a privacy policy that explains how it uses your personal information before you choose to provide it.
- ✓ **The website has a disclaimer.** You can easily find a disclaimer that explains that the website is for information only and should not replace seeing your health care provider.
- ✓ **The website includes an advertising policy.**
You can find a policy to help you tell the difference between what information is edited properly and what is advertising. This policy also explains who pays for the information on the website.

- ✓ **The website is easy to use.** You are able to find important information and move through the website easily.

Which health information websites should I avoid?

Avoid websites that:

- talk about “miracle cures”, or try to sell you a health related product. If it seems too good to be true, it probably is!
- have advertisements included in the body of the articles
- ask you to pay to create an account or to see their information
- don’t provide:
 - clear author information
 - the date the website was created or updated
 - any contact details
 - a privacy policy
- are made up only of forums or discussion groups. These webpages may be a good place to share your personal journey and find the support of others, but they are not usually run by medical professionals.

Be sure to discuss any advice or information you find on web forums with your health care provider before acting on it.

How do I protect my privacy?

Avoid sharing private information about yourself on a website. Carefully read through the privacy policy of a website to make sure that it will not share your personal information with others.

If you can’t find a clear privacy policy, don’t provide your personal information. On any website, avoid sharing your:

- Social Insurance Number (SIN)
- credit card information
- home address
- date of birth

Good quality websites will not charge you money to access their health information.

Where can I learn more?

The Patient and Family Libraries at UHN can help you to learn more about finding good quality health information on the internet.

Contact the UHN Patient & Family Library or that is most convenient to you, or visit www.uhnpatienteducation.ca to learn more.

Princess Margaret Cancer Centre

Patient & Family Library
Main Floor, Atrium, 610 University Ave.
Phone: 416 946 4501, extension 5383
Email: patienteducationpmh@uhn.ca

Toronto General Hospital

Peter and Melanie Munk Patient
& Family Learning Centre and Library
Norman Urquhart Building – Level 1
585 University Ave.
Phone: 416 340 4800, extension 5951
Email: tgpen@uhn.ca

Toronto Rehab – University Centre

Sun Life Patient & Family
Resource Centre
Main Floor, Room 1-123
550 University Ave.
Phone: 416 597 3422, extension 3558
Email: torontorehabhealthinfo@uhn.ca

Toronto Western Hospital

Paul B. Helliwell Patient &
Family Library
West Wing – 1st floor
399 Bathurst St.
Phone: 416 603 6277
Email: twpfl@uhn.ca

Visit www.uhnpatienteducation.ca for more health information.

Contact us to provide feedback or request this brochure in a different format, such as large print or electronic formats: pfep@uhn.ca

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