

Information About Health

Lesson Focus

To make wise health choices, you need to gather and evaluate available health information.

Why Learn This?

You can use what you learn to find reliable information about health products and your health.

Your doctor has medical training and knows your health history. When you visit a doctor, be sure to ask any questions you have. ▼

People in the Know About Health

An important skill that everyone should have is knowing how to find and use reliable health information. Today you can find health information just about anywhere—on the Internet, in books, pamphlets, newspapers, magazines, and in other printed materials. You can ask a variety of people—your parents, health-care professionals, teachers, even your friends. All these sources seem to have answers, but they don't always agree. How do you know which sources to trust? Knowing how to evaluate sources of health information will help you decide which information is reliable.

Often, the best place to start when you want health information is your parents or guardians. If they don't know the answer, they can help you find it.



Some of the best sources of health information are doctors, dentists, pharmacists, and other health-care professionals. They've spent many years learning about the human body and health products. You and your parents can talk to these professionals about health questions. Other good sources for health information are consumer groups and health organizations. Organizations such as the American Lung Association and the American Heart Association are always willing to provide answers to your questions.

One source of information you probably have considered is your friends. Getting answers from friends about most health questions isn't a good idea. Your friends probably don't know more than you do about most health topics. In addition, they don't always know what is right for you.

SUMMARIZE Why are doctors and pharmacists good sources of health information?

Talking with friends is important for everyone, but taking friends' advice on health care isn't a wise choice. Why? ▼



ACTIVITY



Life Skills

Communicate

How could a pharmacist help you choose an acne product that is right for you? What information would you give the pharmacist about yourself? What questions would you ask?



▲ Pharmacists are trained professionals who fill prescriptions written by doctors and dentists. Pharmacists can give you reliable information about medicines and health products.

Evaluating Health Websites

More and more people are turning to the Internet to find health information. You can find many websites filled with reliable health facts. However, it's important to remember that anyone can put information on the Internet. Here are some questions to help you evaluate whether a website provides solid health information.

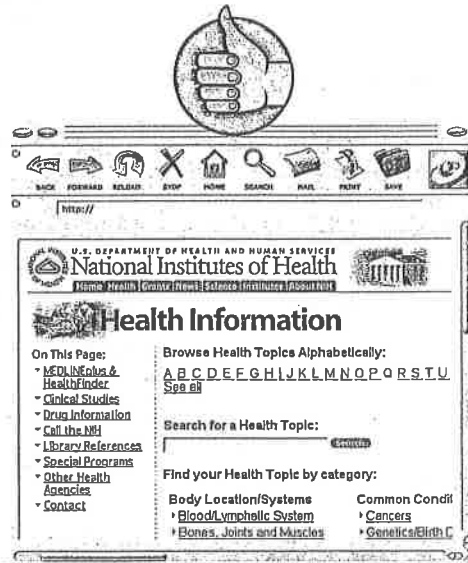


DRAW CONCLUSIONS Why is comparing the information from several websites a good practice?



Who controls the website?

A website can be biased, or slanted, toward one viewpoint. For example, the maker of a health product may have only good things to say about the product. Look for websites that are run by a university or by the government (.gov). These are more reliable than websites run by individuals or by companies that make products.



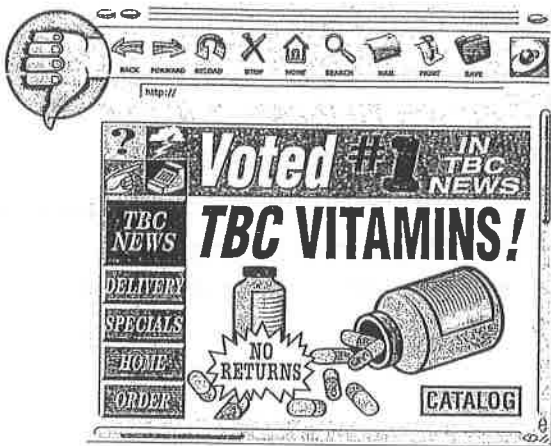
Who is saying it?

Information from doctors, nurses, and other health-care professionals is usually reliable. Look for the initials of a college degree, such as M.D., R.N., Ph.D., or Pharm.D., after the writer's name. Newspaper and magazine sites usually check their facts with health professionals, so they usually are reliable, too.



Does the site look good?

Frequent spelling or grammar mistakes and poor design are warning signs. If those who made the website didn't take time to fix simple mistakes, they may not have taken time to check their health facts, either.



Is the website selling something?

Sites that are trying to sell products may not be reliable. Often, they tell you only what makes their products or services sound good. Nonprofit websites are usually more reliable sources of health information.



What is the evidence?

Personal stories about how a health product has changed people's lives or health can sound convincing. However, personal stories are not as reliable as scientifically tested information. Look for sites with evidence from scientific research.



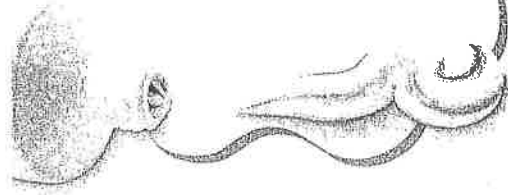
Do websites agree?

Always check more than one website when looking for specific health information. You may find that the health "facts" claimed in one website are said to be false by another. If several sites agree on the facts, the information probably is reliable.

Quick Activity

Evaluate Information

Suppose you need to decide which toothpaste would best care for your teeth. Name three sources of information you could use to help you decide. List the sources in order from the most reliable to the least reliable. Explain why you ordered the sources as you did.



Health Facts from Other Sources

You can get health information from a variety of print materials. Reference books such as encyclopedias and dictionaries usually provide health facts that you can trust. Medical journals have information based on recent scientific research. You also can get a lot of reliable health information from the publications of health organizations.

Many magazines have health information, but be sure the information is written or approved by health professionals or consumer groups. Some magazines give information that is not supported by science. Beware of magazine articles that tell about "miracle" health products, fad diets, and weight-loss products. These articles are not reliable sources of information.

MAIN IDEA AND DETAILS What are three reliable print sources of health information?

