

## TIPS for Finding & Evaluating Online Health Information

*Adapted from the Medical Library Association's "A User's Guide to Finding and Evaluating Health Information on the Web"*

### Getting Started

*Using general search engines to find information on a health topic often results in hundreds of "hits." How can you find meaningful, accurate information?*

1. Use health subsets or categories in general search engines, such as Google or Yahoo.
2. Become familiar with the general health information finding tools such as [MEDLINEPlus](http://www.medlineplus.gov) (<http://www.medlineplus.gov>), produced by the National Library of Medicine, or [Healthfinder](http://www.healthfinder.gov)® (<http://www.healthfinder.gov>) from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, which can get you started by pointing you to good, credible health information quickly.
3. Use specialized sites recommended by health professionals and health sciences librarians. Bookmark the sites for future reference.
4. When you have found sites that look relevant, use the guidelines below to help you decide whether the information is as credible, timely, and useful as it looks.

### Content Evaluation Guidelines

#### 1. Who sponsors the site?

- Can you easily identify the site sponsor? Sponsorship is important because it helps establish the site as respected and dependable. Does the site list advisory board members or consultants? This may give you further insights on the credibility of information published on the site.
- The web address itself can provide additional information about the nature of the site and the sponsor's intent.
  - A government agency has .gov in the address, such as [www.MedlinePlus.gov](http://www.MedlinePlus.gov)
  - An educational institution is indicated by .edu in the address.
  - A professional organization such as a scientific or research society will be identified as .org. For example, the [American Cancer Society's](http://www.cancer.org) website is <http://www.cancer.org>
  - Commercial sites identified by .com will most often identify the sponsor as a company, for example Merck & Co., the pharmaceutical firm.
- What should you know about .com health sites? Commercial sites may represent a specific company or be sponsored by a company using the web for commercial reasons—to sell products. At the same time, many commercial websites have valuable and credible information. Many hospitals have .com in their address. The site should fully disclose the sponsor of the site, including the identities of commercial and noncommercial organizations that have contributed funding, services, or material to the site.

#### 2. Is the information up-to-date?

- The site should be updated or reviewed frequently. Health information changes constantly as new information is learned about diseases and treatments through research and patient care. Websites should reflect the most up-to-date information.
- The website should be consistently available, with the date of the latest revision clearly posted. This usually appears at the bottom of the page.

### 3. Is the information factual?

- Information should be presented in a clear manner. It should be factual (not opinion) and capable of being verified from a primary information source such as the professional literature, abstracts, or links to other web pages.
- Information represented as an opinion should be clearly stated and the source should be identified as a qualified professional or organization.

### 4. Who is the intended audience?

- The website should clearly state whether the information is intended for the consumer or the health professional.
- Many health information websites have two different areas - one for consumers, one for professionals. The design of the site should make selection of one area over the other clear to the user.

## USEFUL HEALTH WEBSITES for Children and Youth with Special Health Care Needs



**Congenital Heart Information Network** (<http://tchin.org/>). This site provides high-quality information for children and adults with congenital heart disease, their families, and health professionals. It is an international organization that aims to provide reliable information, support, and research to families of children with congenital and acquired heart disease, adults with congenital heart defects, and professionals who work with them. Proudly subscribing to the HON code, it has won so many awards it includes a special link to list them. Elements include portraits of patients, a teen lounge area, local chapter links, email options, and lists for family support.



Find a Friend in the  
Family Support Network

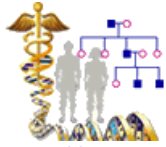
**Children with Diabetes** (<http://www.childrenwithdiabetes.com/>) is sponsored by the Diabetes 123 organization and considers itself to be "the online community for kids, families and adults with diabetes." Like the parent site at diabetes 123, the home page is like a table of contents for the remainder of the site pages, offering options similar to diabetes 123, but focused primarily on the needs of children with diabetes. SEE: Parents' Place: <http://www.childrenwithdiabetes.com/parents/>



<http://www.cincinnatichildrens.org/svc/alpha/c/special-needs/resources/medical-terms.htm> Especially good section on **Understanding Medical Definitions and Terms** for financial, insurance, medical, and special education terminology.



**familydoctor.org** (<http://familydoctor.org/>) is operated by the American Academy of Family Physicians (AAFP), a national medical organization representing more than 93,700 family physicians, family practice residents and medical students. All of the information on this site has been written and reviewed by physicians and patient education professionals at the AAFP.



## Genetics Home Reference

Your Guide to Understanding Genetic Conditions

<http://ghr.nlm.nih.gov/> **Genetics Home Reference** provides consumer-friendly information about the effects of genetic variations on human health. The resources on this site should not be used as a substitute for professional medical care or advice. Users seeking information about a personal genetic disease, syndrome, or condition should consult with a qualified healthcare professional. See [How can I find a genetics professional in my area?](#) in the Handbook.

**Healthfinder**<sup>®</sup> (<http://www.healthfinder.gov/>) is a gateway consumer health information website whose goal is "to improve consumer access to selected health information from government agencies, their many partner organizations, and other reliable sources that serve the public interest." Menu lists on its home page provide links to online journals, medical dictionaries, minority health, and prevention and self-care. The developer and sponsor of this site is the Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, Department of Health and Human Services, with other agencies that also can be linked to via the site. Access to resources on the site is also available in Spanish.



**MayoClinic** (<http://www.mayoclinic.com/>) is an extension of the Mayo Clinic's commitment to provide health education to patients and the general public. Editors of the site include more than 2,000 physicians, scientists, writers, and educators at the Mayo Clinic, a nonprofit institution with more than 100 years of history in patient care, medical research, and education. The website also offers many interactive tools to assist consumers in managing their health.



**MEDLINEplus** (<http://medlineplus.gov/>) is a consumer-oriented website established by the National Library of Medicine, the world's largest biomedical library and creator of the MEDLINE database. An alphabetical list of "Health Topics" consists of more than 800 specific diseases, conditions, and wellness issues. Each Health Topic page contains links to authoritative information on that subject, as well as an optional link to a preformulated MEDLINE search that provides journal article citations on the subject. Additional resources include physician and hospital directories, an online medical dictionary, medical encyclopedia, consumer drug information available by generic or brand name, complementary and alternative medicine & supplements, interactive tutorials and much more.

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