

# MedicinesTalk

Information for consumers and consumer groups about using medicines wisely

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## Finding good information on the internet

Searching for health information on the internet can be overwhelming. For example, using Google to search for information about health conditions can yield thousands or even millions of websites. As a result, it can be hard to know where to start, and which websites to look at. Also, it's often hard to know which information is reliable and which is not, especially if you're new to the topic. This article suggests some websites you can use as a starting point when searching for health information, and gives some hints for using those sites.

### Start with reliable websites

To make it easier for people to find health information, several organisations have set up 'gateway' websites that contain or direct you to good quality health information.

Some such websites are the Better Health Channel, MyDr, Medline Plus, HealthInsite, Health Translations Directory and the National Prescribing Service.

The information in these websites has passed rigorous quality tests to ensure that it is accurate, balanced and up to date.



Starting your search from one of these websites is the easiest way to ensure that the information you find is trustworthy and reliable.

As will be explained below, each of the websites is slightly different. To get the best out of your search, try to choose one that matches your needs.

### Information about health and well-being

#### Better Health Channel

[www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au](http://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au)

The Better Health Channel is a Victorian Government website that contains concise information [cont >](#)

produced by Australian health organisations. It is a good starting point for many searches.

In addition to fact sheets on a vast array of topics, the website has a medical dictionary, links to support groups and patients' stories.

Search for information by clicking on 'Fact sheets by category' or 'Fact sheets — A–Z' in the lefthand column rather than using the search box.

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Starting your search from one of these sites is the easiest way of finding information you can trust.

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### **MyDr**

[www.mydr.com.au](http://www.mydr.com.au)

MyDr is a health information website set up by international medical publishing company CMP Medica. Like Better Health Channel, it contains concise information, and is a good alternative to Better Health Channel.

Search for information by clicking on the relevant letter in the 'Health A–Z' box in the top left corner, or by using the search box.

### **Medline Plus**

[medlineplus.gov](http://medlineplus.gov)

Medline Plus is a United States Government website that directs consumers to websites produced by American institutions and organisations. It includes basic and detailed information, so is useful for introductory and in-depth searches, provided you take account of the fact that the information is American.

Start your search by clicking on 'Health Topics' in the upper left corner of the home page rather than using the search box. You will be taken to a page that starts with a brief summary of the topic and a short list of introductory websites under the heading 'Start here'.

Below, under headings like 'Overviews', 'Diagnosis/Symptoms' and 'Treatments', are short lists of relevant websites for those wanting more detailed information.

Further down the page, for those wanting to delve even deeper, are links to relevant organisations, scientific articles and clinical trials.

### **HealthInsite**

[www.healthinsite.gov.au](http://www.healthinsite.gov.au)

HealthInsite is an Australian Government website that directs consumers to health information produced by Australian health organisations. It is harder to find your way around than the other websites mentioned, so it is more suitable for experienced users.

### **Information about medicines in general**

#### **National Prescribing Service**

[www.nps.com.au/consumers](http://www.nps.com.au/consumers)

The National Prescribing Service is an independent not-for-profit organisation that promotes the quality use of medicines.

The National Prescribing Service website contains

- fact sheets about using medicines wisely, some in languages other than English

- tools and tips to help you manage your medicines
- the NPS Medicine Name Finder (see page 5)
- previous issues of *MedicinesTalk*.

### Australian Prescriber

[www.australianprescriber.com](http://www.australianprescriber.com)

*Australian Prescriber* is an independent not-for-profit journal published six times a year by the National Prescribing Service. It is mainly intended for health professionals, but its website includes a useful section for the general public. Click on 'Consumer Topics'.

### Information about specific medicines

When looking for information about specific medicines, particularly prescription medicines, it is best to use only Australian websites. The names of medicines vary from country to country. If you use a non-Australian website, you may be unwittingly reading information about another medicine.

### CMI leaflets

Consumer Medicine Information (CMI) leaflets explain how a medicine works, how and when to take it, common side effects and potential interactions. They are written specifically for the general public, and are available for most prescription medicines and some non-prescription medicines.

CMI leaflets are a good starting point when seeking information about a particular medicine. They are available on several websites

- National Prescribing Service website by clicking on 'CMI search'



just below the top banner of each page

- Better Health Channel by going to the 'Medicine guide' in the lefthand column of the home page
- MyDr by entering the name of the medicine in the search box in the upper right corner of the home page and clicking on the 'Medicines (CMI)' button.

### Information in other languages

#### Health Translations Directory

[www.healthtranslations.vic.gov.au](http://www.healthtranslations.vic.gov.au)

The Health Translations Directory is a Victorian Government website that directs you to translated health information produced by Australian governments and organisations. The directory contains over 10,000 resources in 58 languages.

Search for information by topic, by language or both. Your search will give you an English summary of the information, and direct you to an English version of the information as well as a version in the requested language or languages. ■

# Checking out health websites

The internet is a vast reservoir of health information. Some of the information is good quality, but some is not. This article gives you some pointers to help you decide whether the information on a website is likely to be trustworthy.

When reading anything on the internet be sceptical, and don't believe everything you read. Don't forget that anyone can put information on the internet, and some of it is inaccurate or misleading. Also, a website may be accurate, but give only half the story. For example, a website may not mention side effects, or it may not tell you that the treatment works for only a few people.

## Who created the website?

Good websites make it clear who created the website. The author may be obvious from the name of the website, or you may need to look in the 'About us' section for details.

Websites created by government, professional and not-for-profit organisations, including patient support and advocacy groups, are more likely to provide accurate and balanced health information than sites created by commercial companies or individuals.

## What is its purpose?

Health websites are created for many reasons: to provide information, sell a product or service, or tell a personal story.

A brief reading of the website will often give you a reasonable idea as to its purpose and possible bias.

Be wary of sites whose main aim is to sell or promote a product or service. Some such websites are clearly advertisements, but some quite cleverly conceal their true purpose. Signs that indicate the website is promoting a service or product rather than providing information include

- use of words like 'miraculous cure', 'secret formula', 'scientific breakthrough', 'amazing results'
- claims that the product or treatment has no side effects
- stories from patients reporting amazing results
- testimonials from celebrities.

## Is it up to date?

Good websites have their information checked and updated regularly. They tell you when this was last done by displaying something like 'Last updated 23 June 2009' on the page or on the home page.

## Does the HealthInsite or HON logo appear on the page?

Websites that display the HealthInsite or Health on the Net Foundation (HON) logo have been judged as being of good quality and suitable for consumers. ■



# A new way to find out medicine names

Knowing the names of all your medicines can prevent you making mistakes that could make you unwell or even put you in hospital.

A common cause of mistakes is taking two brands of a medicine, because the person does not realise that the new medicine they have been given is just a different brand of their existing medicine.

## Two names

Prescription medicines have two names: an active ingredient name and a brand name.

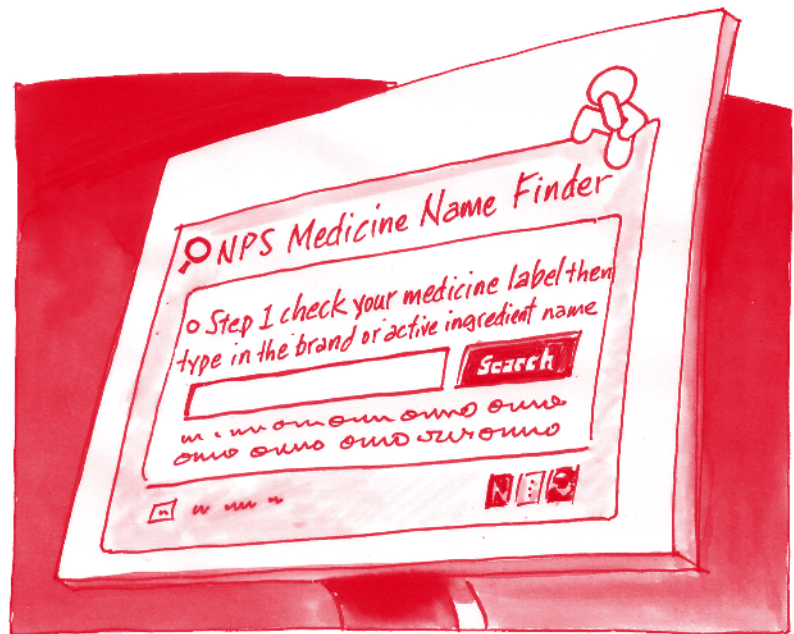
The active ingredient name is the name of the chemical in the medicine that makes it work as intended. The brand name is the name the manufacturer has given the medicine.

## NPS Medicine Name Finder

If you use the internet, finding out the names of your prescription medicines is easier now thanks to the NPS Medicine Name Finder. It helps you work out the names of your medicines, and tells you which is the active ingredient name and which is the brand name.

Use the NPS Medicine Name Finder to

- learn which is the active ingredient name and which is the brand name of your medicine
- make sure that any new medicines you have been given do not have the same active ingredient as any of your existing medicines.



For example, knowing the active ingredient names of all your medicines is particularly useful if you are in hospital. In hospitals, medicines are usually referred to by their active ingredient names, not their brand names. Knowing the active ingredient names of your medicines will mean that you know which of your medicines the doctors and nurses are talking about.

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## How to use the NPS Medicine Name Finder

- Go to [www.nps.org.au/consumers](http://www.nps.org.au/consumers), then click on 'Tools & tips', and then on 'Medicine Name Finder'.
- Type in your medicine name, be it the active ingredient name or the brand name.
- Click on 'Search'. ■

# Get the best out of MedicinesTalk

Late last year, we asked a sample of organisations on our mailing list what they thought about *MedicinesTalk* and how they use it. We're pleased to say that the feedback was positive! Representatives from the organisations told us they use *MedicinesTalk* in many ways, but were keen to hear about other ways they might use it for the benefit of their members and clients. Here are some of their ideas, plus a few of our own.

## Use in your group

Many groups told us they use *MedicinesTalk* in discussions with members, staff and clients, in training sessions, in peer education and support group discussions, in waiting areas and so on. Some organisations use the whole *MedicinesTalk*, while others use just those articles that are relevant to their members or clients.

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You don't need to ask for permission to reprint *MedicinesTalk* articles.

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## Pass on to others

Some groups told us they pass on spare copies of *MedicinesTalk* to other groups and individuals. For example, one group that meets in a church hall leaves their spare copies out for other groups that use the hall. Some groups leave copies in the local GP's waiting room or at their local pharmacist. One person in a small rural town leaves copies at the general store, as it's the town's central information point.



Several people said they take *MedicinesTalk* home to family or friends to read. Members of one multicultural group take home copies and get their grandchildren to read the articles to them.

## Reprint articles

Many organisations reprint articles that are particularly relevant to members in their own newsletters. *MedicinesTalk* articles can be copied from the National Prescribing Service website, so you don't have to retype them. To do this, find the article you want at [www.nps.org.au/consumers/publications/medicines\\_talk](http://www.nps.org.au/consumers/publications/medicines_talk), then select (highlight) the text, and copy and paste it into your document. Alternatively, contact the National Prescribing Service, and ask for a

### Subscribe to print version

Go to [www.nps.org.au/ordernow](http://www.nps.org.au/ordernow), and scroll down to 'MedicinesTalk'. Put the number of copies you want in the box in the 'Subscribe to print version' column, and give your details below. Otherwise, ring National Prescribing Service on 02 8217 8700. *MedicinesTalk* will be posted to you four times a year.

### Subscribe to e-alert

To save paper, you can receive an email (e-alert) that tells you that a new edition of *MedicinesTalk* has been released, and gives you a link to the internet version.

Subscribe as described, but click on the box in the 'Subscribe to e-alert' column.

To change your paper copy subscription to an e-alert, ring the National Prescribing Service on 02 8217 8700.

### MedicinesTalk on the internet

To find current and previous editions, or to look for articles on particular topics, go to [www.nps.org.au/consumers](http://www.nps.org.au/consumers) and click on 'Publications', then click on 'MedicinesTalk'.

Word document version of the article you want.

You don't have to ask for permission to reprint articles, but please acknowledge *MedicinesTalk* and the National Prescribing Service. For example, 'Reproduced with permission, National Prescribing Service, *MedicinesTalk*, Spring 2009'.

### Read out articles

At least one community radio station reads out *MedicinesTalk* articles to listeners on the air. This is a really good idea, as it reaches lots of people, including people with vision problems. Another organisation said they read out *MedicinesTalk* articles in their meetings.

### Make MedicinesTalk a favourite

If you use the internet, add the *MedicinesTalk* website page to your list of 'Favourites', so you can find it quickly. ■

## NPS Medicines Line answers your questions

*Each day, scores of people ring the pharmacists at NPS Medicines Line (see back page) on 1300 888 763 to ask questions about their medicines. Here's one from Sarah.*

**Q** I've been feeling depressed lately and a friend recommended St John's wort. The only medicine I take is the oral contraceptive pill. Is it safe to take these together?

**A** St John's wort has been shown to be effective in mild to moderate depression. However, despite being a natural medicine, St John's wort has been reported to interact with many other medicines, including the oral contraceptive pill. Some women taking the pill and St John's wort have reported bleeding between periods, irregular bleeding and contraceptive failure, ie pregnancy. As there is a risk of the pill not working if you take it in combination with St John's wort, I would recommend that you discuss with your doctor other ways of tackling your feelings of depression.

# Useful information

## CMI leaflet

Consumer Medicine Information (CMI) leaflets have been written for most prescription and many non-prescription medicines. The leaflets explain how the medicine works, how and when to take it, common side effects and potential interactions. Obtain the CMI for your medicine from your pharmacist, NPS Medicines Line or the NPS website ([www.nps.org.au/consumers](http://www.nps.org.au/consumers)).

## Home Medicines Review

A Home Medicines Review (HMR) involves a pharmacist visiting your home to check and discuss all your medicines. The visit is organised in consultation with your GP, who receives a report afterwards. Talk to your GP or pharmacist if you want to find out more about Home Medicines Reviews.

## NPS Medicines List

Use an NPS Medicines List to keep an up-to-date record of all your medicines. Keep it with you at all

times for emergencies, and take it with you when you go to a doctor, pharmacist, health centre or hospital. The list is available in English, traditional and simplified Chinese, Greek, Italian and Vietnamese. Order a copy free of charge from the NPS website ([www.nps.org.au/consumers](http://www.nps.org.au/consumers)).

## NPS Medicines Line

Ring NPS Medicines Line on 1300 888 763 to talk to a pharmacist about your prescription, over-the-counter and complementary medicines for the cost of a local call (calls from mobiles may cost more). The service is open 9 am–5 pm Monday–Friday (EST).

## Questions to ask about your medicines (new)

A reminder list of questions to ask your doctor or pharmacist is available in English (as a fact sheet) and in traditional and simplified Chinese and Italian (as a wallet-sized list). Order a copy free of charge from the NPS website ([www.nps.org.au/consumers](http://www.nps.org.au/consumers)).

### Who writes MedicinesTalk

MedicinesTalk is written and edited by Ros Wood and Sarah Fogg, and overseen by an Editorial Committee comprising consumer representatives, health professionals and the National Prescribing Service (NPS).

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All due care is taken to provide accurate and reliable information. However, the information in MedicinesTalk is not medical advice, so seek professional help before

making decisions. Opinions expressed in MedicinesTalk are not necessarily those of the editors or NPS.

### Spread the word

You are welcome to reproduce articles from MedicinesTalk provided that you reproduce the whole article and acknowledge MedicinesTalk and the National Prescribing Service.

### Get your copy of MedicinesTalk

MedicinesTalk is published quarterly free of charge on paper and online. Visit [www.nps.org.au/consumers](http://www.nps.org.au/consumers) to subscribe to the paper version or view the online version. You can also write to MedicinesTalk, NPS, Reply Paid 1980, Strawberry Hills NSW 2012 or ring 02 8217 8700.