

Not all health information on the internet is reliable, but there are ways to tell the difference between the good and the not-so-good. Asking yourself the following questions will help you decide whether a website is a reliable source of information.

Before you act on any medicines information you find on the internet, discuss it with your doctor or pharmacist. They are the best source of advice for your individual situation.

Who has provided the information?

- ▶ Is it clear who wrote the material?
- ▶ Do the authors state their perspective or backgrounds, such as 'we are an evidence-based organisation' or 'I am a cancer survivor'?
- ▶ Is it clear who published and funded the site?
- ▶ Is it clear why the site was developed?
- ▶ Can you contact the author or publisher?

 Sites that give information without trying to sell you something will probably give you more balanced advice.

Is the content complete and in depth?

- ▶ Is it clear whether the material is based on scientific evidence?
- ▶ Is it clear where the information is sourced from?
- ▶ Is it clear whether a medical expert verified the information?
- ▶ Are the linked websites of high quality?
- ▶ Is the site Australian?

 If the website is not Australian, some of the information provided might not be appropriate to you.

For particular diseases or conditions

Does the website describe:

- ▶ the causes and, if applicable, how to prevent them
- ▶ how to recognise the symptoms
- ▶ how the condition is diagnosed
- ▶ treatments, procedures and alternatives?

For information on treatments

Does the website cover:

- ▶ how treatments work
- ▶ the benefits and risks
- ▶ the effects on quality of life
- ▶ possible non-medicine treatments and lifestyle options
- ▶ the likely effect of not using the treatment?

Does it promise too much?

Reliable sites acknowledge that outcomes cannot be guaranteed. Beware if the site:

- ▶ promises that the medicine will be effective for everyone
- ▶ promises an instant or 'miracle' cure
- ▶ uses words like 'secret ingredient' or 'side effect free'.

Is the information up to date?

- ▶ Is the date of the last update clearly visible?

 General information about an illness may not change much in two or three years, but information about its treatments may.

Does the site provide privacy guidelines?

- ▶ Are the site's privacy guidelines clearly stated?
- ▶ If the site asks you for information, does it tell you exactly why it wants this information?
- ▶ If you have to register to use the site, is the reason clear and is your privacy ensured?

For reliable health information on the internet

- ▶ The NPS website at www.nps.org.au
- ▶ The Australian Government's HealthInsite website at www.healthinsite.gov.au.
- ▶ Consumer Health Forum of Australia at www.chf.org.au



Look for the HealthInsite and HON code logos. These indicate that the information provided is from a trustworthy source



NPS and CHF are partners in the Community Quality Use of Medicines program.

Published: Jul 2007. Updated June 2011

This information is not intended to take the place of medical advice and you should seek advice from a qualified health professional. Reasonable care is taken to provide accurate information at the date of creation. Where permitted by law, NPS disclaims all liability (including for negligence) for any loss, damage or injury resulting from reliance on or use of this information.

Level 7/418A Elizabeth St
Surry Hills NSW 2010
PO Box 1147
Strawberry Hills NSW 2012

P. 02 8217 8700
F. 02 9211 7578
E. info@nps.org.au
www.nps.org.au

Independent, not-for-profit and evidence based, NPS enables better decisions about medicines and medical tests. We are funded by the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing.

© 2011 National Prescribing Service Limited. ABN 61 082 034 393.