

Health Information on the Web

The Internet has become a resource for finding information about healthcare, and the number of available sites grows every day. Many sites provide extremely valuable information, while others are less reliable or downright misleading. The National Institutes of Health suggests some things you should consider when you visit healthcare websites.

1. **Who runs the site?** You should be able to find this easily
2. **Who pays for the site?** It costs money to run a website. Know how the site pays for its existence. A “.gov” site denotes a Government-sponsored site. Does the site sell advertising, and if so, to whom? The source of funding can affect the content.
3. **What is the purpose of the site?** Many sites have an “About This Site” link, which can help you evaluate the trustworthiness of the information.
4. **Where does the information come from?** If the organization in charge of the site did not create the information, the original source should be clearly labeled.
5. **What is the basis of the information?** Medical facts and figures should have references. Opinions or advice should be clearly set apart from “evidence-based” results.
6. **How is the information selected?** Is there an editorial board, do people with excellent professional and scientific qualifications review the material?
7. **How current is the information?** The most recent update/review should be posted.
8. **How does the site choose links to other sites?** Some link to any site that asks or pays; others link only to those that have met certain criteria.
9. **What information about you does the site collect, and why?** Many health websites ask you to “subscribe” or become a member. This may be so they can collect a user fee or select information about you that is relevant to your concerns. In all cases, this gives personal information about you. Credible sites asking for this kind of information should tell you exactly what they will and will not do with it. Be sure you read and understand any privacy policy on the site.
10. **How does the site manage interactions with visitors?** There should always be a way to contact the site owner if you have problems, questions or feedback. If there are chat rooms or online discussions, it should tell you the terms of using the service, such as is it moderated, by whom, and why.

We have included reliable health site links on the Health Care and Patient Safety Tips page of the APWU Health Plan’s website at www.apwuhp.com.