



NATIONWIDE CHILDREN'S
When your child needs a hospital, everything matters.™

Helping Hand™

Health Education for Patients and Families

Can You Trust Health Information on the Web?

At Nationwide Children's Hospital, we think it is important that you know how to find health information you can trust. This checklist can help you know what to look for and how to decide what information is valuable.

Plan your Search

- Know your goals.** Different websites are good at different things. Are you looking for support or information? **Chat rooms and forums** can be wonderful sources of support, but may or may not provide reliable medical information. **Medical journal websites** may offer in-depth information on diseases and treatments, but may seem cold, distant or clinical. Your goals will help you decide where to look.
- Keep a list.** Write down words that may be useful and a list of questions you have.
- Talk with your child's health care providers.** They may be able to help you with search terms (with correct spelling) or share good websites that will help in your search.
- Ask the librarians at the Nationwide Children's Family Library** to help you find what you need. They can give you a list of reliable websites and will help you with learning the medical terms you need to know.
- Be prepared to find conflicting information.** You can find different views about almost every health issue. Remember that some "information" you will find will be opinion, not fact. Sometimes it's hard to tell the difference. Trust yourself and your child's health care providers to find the answers that best fit your family.

Check the Source

- Look for .edu (educational institution), .org (organization, usually not-for-profit), or .gov (government agency) in the name of the website.** The information on a site that ends in **.com (commercial business)** may not be impartial. Commercial websites are businesses. They may offer information to help sell a particular product or service.
- Where did the information come from and who is the author?**

Is the author's name (or the name of the organization responsible for the article) clearly stated? What makes the author an expert on the subject? Is the information a research finding? Professional opinion? Individual experience? Does the site provide contact information for the author (full name, address, phone number or e-mail)? Is the author's reason for sharing the information clear?
- Check the date.** You should be able to tell when the document was last reviewed, updated or checked for accuracy. New medical research is published all the time. Is the date of the last revision clearly marked? If information is only valid for a short time, is this clearly labeled? Can you find more recent information on the topic?
- Is the information independently verifiable or is it just the author's view?**

Does the information urge you to conclude that you need a product or service offered through the website? For example, you may find a website that promotes exercise and active living. Note if they also sell exercise equipment. That doesn't mean the information is necessarily wrong. Just keep in mind that the information may also be helping to sell a product or service.
- Wikipedia.org and other Wiki sites may be not-for-profit. (However!)** Always remember that **anyone** can upload content to Wikis. Wikipedia might be fine for finding overview information. It can sometimes give good sources to help with your search. The sections called "See also" and "Notes and references" at the bottom of each article can be a helpful start.

Judge the Content

- Is it focused on pediatrics** (medical care for kids)? Health information and advice for adults may not apply to a child. Does the source of information have expertise in pediatrics?
- Does it diagnose or offer specific medical advice for your situation?** No website can know your family well enough to diagnose a condition. A website is never a substitute for your child's doctor. Any website that claims to know the best treatment for your child's medical symptoms is...well...wrong.
- Is there clear and adequate disclosure?** Is there a possibility for bias or conflict of interest? Is a company telling you that only their product or service is valuable? Are all sides of the issue presented? Are commercial links or sponsors clearly stated and separate from the health information? If the site asks for information about you, do they tell you exactly why they want it? Do they state their privacy guidelines?
- What kind of proof is given for endorsing a specific treatment or service?**
The results of scientific studies are different from first-hand experiences.
- Are there clear caution statements?** Does the site offer a clear statement that health information should not be taken as health advice or as a substitute for visiting a health care professional?
- Check the funding source.** Sometimes a site will be funded by outside sources like advertisers or foundations. The funding source should be clearly identified. Advertising should be presented so that you can clearly see the difference between ads and content.
- Discuss your findings with your healthcare provider.** The information you find may or may not apply to your child and his or her individual condition. Your child's doctor or nurse can help you to interpret and understand how the information relates to you and your child.