Important Facts You Should Know About Health Information and the Internet

Health Info and the Internet Basics:
“Don’t believe everything that you read.” This old warning holds true for the huge amount of information about health and health conditions on the internet. The internet has made health information readily available for millions of people. However, the internet has also made it possible for false or inaccurate information about health to be shared quickly and easily. This fact sheet can help you determine whether the health information you find on the Internet or receive in your e-mail is reliable.

Sources of the health information:
Any website that provides health information should tell you where the information came from. When viewing a website about health, ask these questions:
- Who wrote this information?
- Does the information appear to be someone’s opinion rather than facts?
- Who maintains the webpage?

If the webpage you are on does not tell you who published the information, look for an “about us” or “about this site” link to learn more about the author(s) of the information.

Another clue about where the information is coming from can be found in the webpage address. Health-related websites that are published by the government will end in .gov (for example, The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention is a government health agency and their website address is http://www.cdc.gov). Non-profit organizations will have an .org ending on their website addresses (for example, the Kentucky River District Health Department address is http://www.krdhd.org). College and university web pages will end in .edu (for example, the University of Kentucky address is http://www.uky.edu). Individuals and companies use the .com ending for their web pages.

Quality of the Information:
When looking at health information on the internet, question the quality of the information. The information provided should be well written with complete sentences and correct grammar and spelling. Good information will not use common chat and texting abbreviations. All words will be correctly written out.

The font used on a website can often provide clues as to the reliability of the information. Often if the font is unusually large or not a font you generally see on pamphlets or other information sheets provided by a doctor, the website is likely created by an individual instead of a more reliable agency.

Reliable health information on the internet should be current. Avoid websites that have not been updated for long periods of time. Also, if there are a lot of broken links on the website, the site may not be kept up to date. It is especially important that health information be current; therefore, look for an “updated” or “reviewed” date on the webpage to determine whether the information provided is current.
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Biased Health Information:
When viewing health information on the internet, it is important to remember who is providing the information. Companies and individuals often provide information in hopes that you will try their product. This information may be inaccurate. To determine whether the information you are viewing is likely to be reliable, it is important to determine if the person writing the information is trying to sell you something. Sites that are providing reliable health information will not try to sell you something.

Privacy:
Do not provide your personal health information or financial information (credit card) to any website. All quizzes about health should be anonymous and should never ask for your name, address, or credit card information. Any website that asks for information about you should clearly tell you how it uses the information.

Reliable Sources of Health Information:
The following sources are known to provide reliable health information:
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [http://www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)
- Kentucky River District Health Department [http://www.krdhd.org](http://www.krdhd.org)

How do I determine if the health information I find on the internet is accurate?

- Check the source of the information.
- Use known sources such as the CDC, Health Department, or other health organizations (.org links) when possible.
- Determine whether the website may be biased on a topic due to a product being sold by the company.
- Check the quality of the information being provided:
  - Information should be up-to-date.
  - Sources should be provided.
  - Font should be readable
  - Links on the page should work.
- Do not provide your personal or financial information to any website.

What Can You Do Now?
The Rural Cancer Prevention Center (RCPC) can help you find a healthcare provider or more information about health.

For more information, please contact us at: [http://www.mc.uky.edu/ruralhealth/rcpc.asp](http://www.mc.uky.edu/ruralhealth/rcpc.asp) or call toll-free (866) 686-7272.