



Evaluating Health Information Websites

With so many web sites giving information about health issues it can be confusing and difficult to know if you can trust what you read. The following questions will help you to decide whether or not a health information web site is providing reliable and accurate information.

- **Who runs this site?**
- **Who pays for this site?**
- **What is the purpose of this site?**
- **Where does the information come from?**
- **Do facts and figures include references?**
- **Who reviews the information on this site?**
- **How up to date is the information?**
- **Does the site collect information about you and if so why?**

Who runs this site?

A good health information web site will clearly show you who is responsible for the site. Look for an organization's name or logo; it should be on every major page of the site and link back to the organization's homepage.

Who pays for this site?

There are a few easy ways to figure this out if it isn't clear right away

- web site addresses ending in .gov are sponsored by the government
- web site addresses ending in .edu are run by an educational institution
- web site addresses ending in .org are run by non-profit organizations

Very obvious would be advertisers on the web site. For example, sometimes drug companies will purchase advertising space on health information web sites. This means that they are paying for at least part of the costs to maintain that site.

The money source, or who pays for a web site is important because it can affect

- what content or information is posted on the site
- how that content or information is presented
- whether the information on the site is fact or opinion
- the web sites agenda or purpose, for example to sell a product

What is the purpose of this site?

The quickest way to find out the answer to this question is to visit the About This Site or About Us section of the web site. Many sites have them and use the space to let users know who they are and why they have created the site. This information can help you to decide whether or not the site is truthful.

Where does the information come from?

Many health information web sites have content or information on their site that they have collected from other web sites or sources. In this case, the original source should be clearly stated.

Do facts and figures include references?

The web site should clearly state the sources, research studies or articles to back up facts and figures.

Opinions about the facts or figures should be clearly understood to be separate from the information based on research results.

Who reviews the information on this site?

Is the health information on this web site reviewed by experts in this field? Do the reviewers have the professional or scientific backgrounds that would qualify them to review the material carefully before it is posted on the site?

Some web sites have an editorial board. The names and qualifications of the editorial board members should be available on the site.

How up to date is the information on this site?

It is very important that health information web sites are updated regularly in order to keep up with current medical information. The web site should clearly state when the site has last been updated or reviewed.

Does the site collect information about you and if so why?

Make sure to read the privacy policy of the web site before you volunteer any personal information the site might collect by asking you to

subscribe, register for updates/newsletters or become a member. A trustworthy site will let you know exactly what they will and will not do with the information they collect from you. If the privacy policy is vague or unclear, do not sign up for anything that you do not completely understand.

Can you contact the site owner with questions or feedback?

Reliable health information web sites will almost always have a way for users to send a question or feedback. Some sites will also include a phone number or email and list their physical address.