

Evaluating online health information

Many Canadians go online to search for medical and health-related information. The internet is the first source of information for many people, before even speaking to a doctor or other healthcare provider.

Online health information can have many positive impacts on our health knowledge, behaviours, and well-being. Unfortunately, the quality and accuracy of online health information is not consistent, including social media where information quality can be very low.



Being able to evaluate online health information is an important skill.

How do I evaluate online health information?

Use the steps below to evaluate the health information you find online.

- **Check the date**

Look to see when the website was created or last updated. Health information should be up to date to make sure it is relevant and accurate. Even if the information has not changed, it should be regularly reviewed.

- **Check the author**

Identify the author to determine if they have the necessary background, experience, or training to accurately discuss the topic. See [How to Determine an Author's Credibility](#) for more information.

- **Look for the evidence**

Health information should be based on facts rather than opinion, rumours, or personal stories. Authors and websites should clearly list their sources, so that you can check the information for yourself.

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- **Understand the purpose**

Read a website's "About Us" page to understand the website's purpose and who runs it. Are they credible and unbiased? Be cautious of websites selling a product. Their information may already be biased, as the goal is to make profit rather than present clear facts. Often product claims are too good to be true.

- **Be critical of the details**

Be skeptical of websites that look outdated, contain broken links, or have spelling and grammar errors. Patient information should be written in plain language, making it easy to follow.

- **Protect your privacy**

Be careful when sharing your personal information. Look for a privacy policy to find out how and why your information is being used, stored, or shared.

You should carefully consider the source of the information you find on the internet and discuss that health information with your healthcare provider.

Learn more about evaluating online health information from [Alberta Health Services Knowledge Resource Service](#).

Misinformation and disinformation

Finding information online is faster and easier than ever before. While the information you find online can often be helpful and trustworthy, it is important to keep in mind that the internet also allows for rapid and widespread distribution of false and misleading information.

As you look online for health information, you need to watch for both misinformation and disinformation.

- Misinformation is inaccurate information. In other words, it means getting the facts wrong.
- Disinformation is false information that is deliberately meant to mislead.



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Getting help

Alberta Health Services Knowledge Resource Service library staff are available at healthcare facilities across the province. They can work with you to help you find and evaluate online health information.

The Knowledge Resource Service also offers a free online course for patients and caregivers on evaluating online health information. Find more information and register at: krs.ahs.ca/patients/evaluatingohi.

Wellness Articles

Alberta Health Services encourages all Albertans to live a healthy life. These weekly Wellness Articles are created by a team of healthcare professionals from AHS in collaboration with provincial healthcare experts in Alberta and content from myhealth.alberta.ca. Our experts ensure this information is factual, current, and written for Albertans.

From stress-relief strategies to finding balance within your life, these Wellness Articles cover a variety of different topics designed to inspire and educate Albertans on creating a positive and healthy lifestyle.

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