

Home Care: Non-Medical, Personal Aide Services

 lighthousehc.com/Resources.php

Knowledge Center

As a service from us to you: we have gathered thousands of health information articles. All the articles are authoritatively sourced, constantly updated, bi-lingual, and searchable. Please come back any time you want straightforward, correct answers to health information questions.

Evaluating Health Information

Why do I need to evaluate health information?

Health information is easy to find. But finding reliable health information takes a little effort. Some of the health information you get from newspapers, magazines, books, TV, the Internet, and social media is up to date and trustworthy. But some is not. That's why it's important to evaluate health information for yourself.

But how can you tell the good from the bad? There are two key steps:

- Ask questions before you trust what you read or hear.
- Discuss the information you find with your health care provider before you rely on it. You may have found good information, but your provider can tell you whether it's good for you.

How can I evaluate health information on the Internet?

Asking a few questions will help you decide if you can trust a website. You can usually find most of the answers on the site's "About Us" page. If you can't find information about who runs the website, the site may not be trustworthy, and their health information may be unreliable. Some questions to ask are:

- Who runs the site? Can you trust them to provide balanced, accurate information? Trustworthy sites provide a way to contact the owners with questions or feedback. In general, you'll find good health information on websites run by:
 - Federal government agencies.
 - Medical schools.
 - Large professional or nonprofit organizations. For example, the American College of Cardiology (a professional organization) and the American Heart Association (a nonprofit) and are both reliable sources of information on heart health.
- What's the purpose of the site? Is it to:
 - Inform the public?
 - Sell products or services?
 - Promote the opinions of a person or group?

A trustworthy website has one goal: To give you good information.
- Who pays for the site?
 - If the site is funded by ads, they should be clearly marked as advertisements. Watch out for ads designed to look like neutral health information.
 - If a business pays for the site, the health information may favor that business and its products.
- Is the health information high quality? Good health information doesn't promote one treatment over another. It gives you balanced facts based on research. So, beware of dramatic writing, promises of cures, and claims that sound too good to be true. Those could be signs of a health fraud scam. To evaluate the quality of a website's information, ask:
 - How is the information selected and reviewed to make sure it's accurate? Check the "About Us" page to see if the site has:
 - An editorial board of health experts
 - A content review process
 - A selection policy for content
 - Information about their writers' qualifications, which may be listed at the bottom of the articles
 - Where does the information come from? The content pages should have links or references to the sources of the information.
 - Is the information up to date? Content pages should include dates when the information was written, reviewed, or updated.
- How does the website use your personal information? Look for a privacy policy section to see how your personal information will be used. Don't share information about yourself unless you're comfortable with any risks involved.

When you find a website that seems to be trustworthy, don't stop there. Look to see if other reliable sites have similar health information.

How can I evaluate health information on social media?

A social media post may come from someone you know, but that doesn't guarantee it's good information. Many of the questions you use to evaluate a website also work for social media too. Ask where the information comes from, why it exists, and if anyone is funding it.

How can I evaluate health stories in the news?

Some news stories about medical research may not include all the facts you need to know. Ask these questions:

- Does the story say whether the research involved people or animals?
- If it was people, how many people were in the study and who were they?
- How long was the study?
- What type of study was it?
- Who paid for the research?

If you learn a few tips for understanding medical research, you'll be able to decide if a news story may apply to your health. Then you can discuss the information with your provider.

How can I evaluate health information in books?

To evaluate health information in books, ask:

- How old is the book?
- Is the author an expert on the subject?
- Does the book offer different points of view or just those of the author?
- Has the book been reviewed by other experts?
- Does the book list the sources of the content?

After you evaluate health information, talk with your provider before using it to make decisions that may affect your health.

NIH: National Library of Medicine

Personal Health Records

You've probably seen your chart at your doctor's office. In fact, you may have charts at several doctors' offices. If you've been in the hospital, you have a chart there, too. These charts are your medical records. They may be on paper or electronic. To keep track of all this information, it's a good idea to keep your own personal health record.

What kind of information would you put in a personal health record? You could start with:

- Your name, birth date, blood type, and emergency contact information
- Date of last physical
- Dates and results of tests and screenings
- Major illnesses and surgeries, with dates
- A list of your medicines and supplements, the dosages, and how long you've taken them
- Any allergies
- Any chronic diseases
- Any history of illnesses in your family

Health Literacy

What is health literacy?

Health literacy involves the information that people need to be able to make good decisions about health. There are two parts:

- Personal health literacy is about how well a person can find and understand the health information and services that they need. It is also about using the information and services to make good health decisions.
- Organizational health literacy is about how well organizations help people find the health information and services that they need. It also includes helping them use that information to make good health decisions.

Which factors can affect health literacy?

Many different factors can affect a person's health literacy, including their:

- Knowledge of medical words
- Understanding of how the health care system works
- Ability to communicate with health care providers
- Ability to find health information, which may require computer skills
- Reading, writing, and number skills
- Personal factors, such as age, income, education, language abilities, and culture
- Physical or mental limitations

Many of the same people who are at risk for limited health literacy also have health disparities. Health disparities are health differences between different groups of people. These groups may be based on age, race, sex, or other factors.

Why is health literacy important?

Health literacy is important because it can affect your ability to:

- Make good decisions about your health.
- Get the medical care you need. This includes preventative care, which is care that focuses on preventing disease and keeping you healthy.
- Take your medicines correctly.
- Manage a disease, especially a chronic (long-term) disease.
- Lead a healthy lifestyle.

One thing that you can do is to make sure that you communicate well with your health care providers. If you don't understand something a provider tells you, ask them to explain it to you so that you understand. You can also ask the provider to write down their instructions.

Family History

Your family history includes health information about you and your close relatives. Families have many factors in common, including their genes, environment, and lifestyle. Looking at these factors can help you figure out whether you have a higher risk for certain health problems, such as heart disease, stroke, and cancer.

Having a family member with a disease raises your risk, but it does not mean that you will definitely get it. Knowing that you are at risk gives you a chance to reduce that risk by following a healthier lifestyle and getting tested as needed.

You can get started by talking to your relatives about their health. Draw a family tree and add the health information. Having copies of medical records and death certificates is also helpful.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Medical Ethics

The field of ethics studies principles of right and wrong. There is hardly an area in medicine that doesn't have an ethical aspect. For example, there are ethical issues relating to :

- End of life care: Should a patient receive nutrition? What about advance directives and resuscitation orders?
- Abortion: When does life begin? Is it ethical to terminate a pregnancy with a birth defect?
- Genetic and prenatal testing: What happens if you are a carrier of a defect? What if testing shows that your unborn baby has a defect?

- Birth control: Should it be available to minors?
- Is it ethical to harvest embryonic stem cells to treat diseases?
- Organ donation: Must a relative donate an organ to a sick relative?
- Your personal health information: who has access to your records?
- Patient rights: Do you have the right to refuse treatment?
- When you talk with your doctor, is it ethical for her to withhold information from you or your family?