

Finding Health Information Online

Finding health information online does not replace visiting and talking to your health care providers. It can help you start a discussion with them and think about questions you want to ask.

Finding Health Information Online

Many people look for health information online. Using Google may give you lots of information, but it may not be the best information. The quality of information online varies. Anyone can set up a website. Some websites are reliable, and others are not.

You need to decide what information is helpful.
This pamphlet lists some reliable sources.

The internet can be helpful, but it should never replace talking to your health care providers. They are the experts.

This pamphlet is just a guide. If you have questions, please talk to your health care provider. We are here to help you.

The questions below can help you decide if a health-related website is reliable. You should be able to answer yes to these questions. If you cannot, you may want to check other websites for information you can trust.

Even if you can answer yes to these questions, it does not mean that the information on the website is correct and unbiased (not influenced to have a certain opinion). These questions are just a guide. They cannot cover everything.

- **Did a health care provider write the information?**
 - › The website should show the names, training, and qualifications of the authors, or the name of the organization responsible for the information. If a university, government, or professional society wrote the information, this is usually a good sign.

- **If the author is not a health care provider, do they explain their interest in the subject (for example, “I’m a cancer survivor”)?**
 - › The information may be about a personal experience. The diagnosis or treatment may not apply to the symptoms you are experiencing, or to your situation.

- **Is there a way to contact the people who run the website, like a “Contact Us” link?**
 - › You should be able to contact the author of any website. If you cannot, this may be a sign of an unreliable source.

- **Is the purpose of the website clear?**
 - › Some websites give information, while others may be trying to sell something.
 - › If the website is selling a product, it will say that the product is great, whether it is or not.

- **Does it say who pays for the website?**
 - › Any organization that has given money, services, or materials should be listed. A company that gives financial help to a website may influence the website’s information. If there are ads on the website, it should be explained by the website’s owner. Check for an advertising policy.

- **Was the website updated recently?**
 - › Websites should be up-to-date, with the date of its last update listed. Look at the top and bottom of each article to see if there is a date for when it was posted. Look at the bottom of any page on the website to see if it has been updated. If the website was updated within the last 6 months, this is a good sign.

- **Is your privacy protected?**
 - › The website should have a policy about what information it collects about you.
 - › Be careful if you are asked to share personal information. Many websites use cookies (pieces of information that the website saves to your computer to remember, like what you clicked on or what products you looked at) to track your online activity. Good websites will tell you what they are tracking and why. This is often done in a popup message at the top or bottom of the page.

- **Is there Canadian information?**

- › This means that the information on the website will be more relevant to you. If a website was made in another country, the health care system may be different.

Things to think about

- There should be a policy or process about how materials are made or checked. They may be reviewed by an editorial board or experts in the field. Look for some mention of this.
- References should be listed to show where the information came from (like another website or health care experts).
- The information on websites like Facebook groups and pages, discussion groups, chat rooms, and personal blogs is often just opinion. If the writers are health care providers, they will say so and clearly explain their backgrounds.
- Beware of websites that attack modern medicine.
- Beware of websites that are selling something.
- Legitimate websites include well-known hospitals, professional associations, governments, non-profit organizations, and universities.

Good starting points for online health information:

Nova Scotia Health patient education pamphlets

- www.nshealth.ca/patientinformation
 - › Includes hundreds of patient education pamphlets created by Nova Scotia Health staff.

Nova Scotia Health Library Services catalogue

- <https://libcat.nshealth.ca>
 - › Search for patient subject guides and more.

IWK Health Centre

- www.iwk.nshealth.ca
 - › Resources include patient pamphlets about women's health, pregnancy, newborn care, child and teen health, and mental health.

Nova Scotia Public Libraries

- <https://novascotia.overdrive.com>
 - › Try searching for “health.”
 - › Ask at your local library branch for more information.

Halifax Public Libraries searchable health databases

- www.halifaxpubliclibraries.ca/resources/health

About Kids Health

- www.aboutkidshealth.ca
 - › Information from The Hospital for Sick Children
 - › Information is provided in multiple languages and includes health resources and games created for kids.

Doctors Nova Scotia

- www.doctorsns.com
 - › Doctors Nova Scotia has up-to-date information on healthy living, illnesses, diseases, and other health-related topics.

St. Joseph's Healthcare Hamilton Patient Education

- www.stjoes.ca/patients-visitors/patient-education/patient-education-a-e
 - › A collection of patient information pamphlets for patients and families.

Healthy Living

- www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/healthy-living/your-health/alphabetical-list.html
 - › This is part of the Health Canada website. Health-related topics are listed in alphabetical order.

McGill University Health Centre - Patient Education Office

- www.muhcpatienteducation.ca
 - › This website offers Canadian information and gives links to other sites.

MedlinePlus®

- <https://medlineplus.gov>
 - › This website is funded by the U.S. National Library of Medicine. It is patient-focused and has a medical dictionary.

National Institute on Aging

- <https://nia.nih.gov/health>
 - › This website gives general health and wellness information for older adults.

Nova Scotia Department of Health and Wellness

- <https://novascotia.ca/dhw>
 - › This website gives details on the provincial health care plan (MSI), wait times, and provincial programs (like mental health and continuing care).

Public Health Agency of Canada

- www.canada.ca/en/public-health.html
 - › This website gives information on diseases and immunizations, public health, and travel health notices.

**What are your questions?
Please ask. We are here to help you.**

Looking for more health information?

Find this pamphlet and all our patient resources here: <https://library.nshealth.ca/PatientEducation>

Contact your local public library for books, videos, magazines, and other resources.

For more information, go to <http://library.novascotia.ca>

Connect with a registered nurse in Nova Scotia any time: call 811 or visit <https://811.novascotia.ca>

Learn about other programs and services in your community: call 211 or visit <http://ns.211.ca>

Nova Scotia Health promotes a smoke-free, vape-free, and scent-free environment.

Please do not use perfumed products. Thank you!

www.nshealth.ca

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The information in this pamphlet is for informational and educational purposes only.

The information is not intended to be and does not constitute health care or medical advice.

If you have any questions, please ask your health care provider.

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The information in this pamphlet is to be updated every 3 years or as needed.