

Evaluating Cancer Information on the Internet [1]

This section has been reviewed and approved by the [Cancer.Net Editorial Board](#) [2], 02/2013

 [Listen to the Cancer.Net Podcast: Evaluating Cancer Treatment Options on the Internet](#)[3], adapted from this feature

The Internet is a useful tool for finding information about cancer and connecting with other patients and caregivers. However, it is sometimes difficult to know whether what you are reading is credible, reliable information about cancer causes, risk factors, treatment, and recovery. Because Internet content is not regulated, you need to use good judgment when searching online for information. Be critical about the sources you use, and be sure to discuss the information you find with your health care team.

Ask yourself the following questions as you visit websites with cancer information:

Who operates the website? The person or organization that operates the website should be identified throughout the site. This way, visitors know the source and purpose of the information, for example, whether it is educating people about a disease or selling a product. Typically, the About Us section provides details about who operates the site. You can use this information to help judge the rest of the material you find on the website.

Who is responsible for the website's content? Reliable websites tell you who edits and approves the content (such as an editorial board of experts) and how to contact the organization that operates the website. For example, the [About Us](#) [4] section on Cancer.Net provides a list of Cancer.Net Editorial Board members—including more than 150 medical, surgical, radiation, and pediatric oncologists; physician assistants; oncology nurses; social workers; and patient advocates—and the seal of approval from the [Health On the Net \(HON\) Foundation](#) [5], an organization that has established a code of conduct for health and medical websites. The [Contact Us](#) [6] link provides visitors with an address, phone number, and e-mail address to reach the Cancer.Net editorial staff.

Be cautious about information posted in discussion groups or on bulletin boards because this part of the website may not be regularly reviewed or updated.

Who funds the website? Where a website gets its financial support may affect how information is presented. This is called bias. High-quality websites make it easy to tell the difference between

advertisements and medical information. Avoid websites that try to promote one specific medication or treatment over another.

How does the website maintain your privacy? If the website requires you to give confidential information, such as your name, address, e-mail, or diagnosis, there should be a separate security or privacy policy statement that tells you how this information will be used. Read Cancer.Net's [privacy policy](#) [7].

Where do they get their information? Reliable cancer information is based on scientific evidence and not personal feelings or experiences. When learning about treatment options, look for links or references to research studies. If information is based on an opinion, it should be clearly labeled. Be cautious about scientific-sounding material that has no data to support it.

How current is the information on the website? Cancer information changes quickly as researchers learn more about various cancer types and develop new treatments. As a result, information that is several years old may no longer be accurate. Look for a date at the beginning or end of an article, which will tell you when the article was published or the last time it was reviewed.

Does the website have a linking policy? Links may take you to other websites. Be aware that the new website may not have the same standards as the one you left. Some sites have a policy of only linking to websites that meet specific criteria, while other sites may include links to any website. Read Cancer.Net's [linking policy](#) [8].

What does your doctor say? Discuss the information you find on the Internet with your doctor or another member of your health care team. Your doctor can help you evaluate the information and determine whether it applies to you.

Other suggestions

- Ask your doctor to suggest reliable websites.
- Bookmark the websites you like and check back regularly for new information. Consider signing up for the website's [newsletter](#) [9] or [RSS feed](#) [10], or follow trusted organizations on social media outlets to stay up to date on new information.
- Trust your judgment if something you read does not seem right or seems too good to be true.

More Information

[How to Protect Yourself From Cancer Treatment Fraud](#) [11]

[Questions to Ask the Doctor](#) [12]

[Cancer Myths](#) [12]

[Medical News: How to Know If It's Accurate](#) [13]

[Understanding Cancer Research Studies](#) [14]

Additional Resources

[U.S. Food and Drug Administration: Beware of Online Cancer Fraud](#) [15]

[Federal Trade Commission: Cancer Treatment Scams](#) [16]

[Quackwatch](#) [17]

Links:

[1] <http://www.cancer.net/research-and-advocacy/introduction-cancer-research/evaluating-cancer-information-internet>

[2] <http://www.cancer.net/about-us>

[3] http://www.cancer.net/sites/cancer.net/files/evaluating_cancer_information_on_the_internet.mp3

[4] <http://www.cancer.net/node/51>

[5] <http://www.hon.ch/HONcode/>

[6] <http://www.cancer.net/node/25104>

[7] <http://www.cancer.net/node/25319>

[8] <http://www.cancer.net/node/25595>

[9] <http://www.cancer.net/node/25357>

[10] <http://www.cancer.net/node/25569>

[11] <http://www.cancer.net/node/24559>

[12] <http://www.cancer.net/node/24460>

[13] <http://www.cancer.net/node/24593>

[14] <http://www.cancer.net/node/24719>

[15] <http://www.fda.gov/ForConsumers/ConsumerUpdates/ucm048383.htm>

[16] <http://www.consumer.ftc.gov/articles/0104-cancer-treatment-scams>

[17] <http://www.quackwatch.com/>