



Searching the internet for health and wellbeing information

If you have an internet connection and a computer, tablet or smartphone then health and wellbeing information is available to you at any time. You can find that information as quickly as you can search for it online.

While the internet can be useful for researching health and wellbeing, it is important to remember that apps and websites should not be used to diagnose yourself or others if you are sick. Always seek the advice of a medical professional if you are unwell. There are a few different ways you can do this:

1. Visit your General Practitioner (GP) or healthcare professional.
2. Call the HealthDirect Helpline on 1800 022 222 for 24-hour non-emergency advice from a registered nurse.
3. Call 000 in an emergency situation.

Finding reliable information

To find reliable health information, you need to know how to search the internet. If you are not confident in doing this, ask your Digital Health Mentor if they offer any basic digital skills courses, such as Be Connected, to teach you how.

Being specific when searching and adding in the name of a reputable website will help narrow down the results and show reliable websites closer to the top of the search results page. For example, searching “knee pain health direct” is better than searching for “leg pain”.

When you try this, in the first few results there should be a link to the HealthDirect website. This is run by the Australian Government so it will contain reliable information.

Ask your Digital Health Mentor for a list of health-focused websites you can use to find reliable information on health and wellbeing.

Search results

Not everything that Google finds will be relevant to you or from a trustworthy source. Look at the web addresses (also known as URLs) to see what type of organisation has created the page.

It is a good idea to only trust results from government websites or health organisations that you recognise, such as Beyond Blue or Cancer Council.

Top tips to spot an unreliable health website

Below are four tips to help you spot a website that might be giving false or unreliable health and wellbeing information:

The site wants to sell you something

If a website is made by a company that is selling a product, the information contained may not be reliable. They may be trying to convince you to buy their product by providing vague or false information, or advertising.

The website is out-of-date

The information on websites has to be checked and updated regularly to remain reliable. Most websites providing health information will have a date somewhere on the page where it was last updated, so you know it's current and accurate.

The website is written by a private company or individual

More trustworthy health and wellbeing information will usually come from websites ending with .gov, .org.au or .edu. This shows you that the website has been written by a government department, non-profit or educational institution such as a university, rather than a business or individual.

The website will not share information until you create an account or give it information about you

Websites offering genuine health and wellbeing information will not make you create an account or give away personal information about you before offering this information.

Once you have followed the above steps, it is OK to give general information about the topic you're looking for (such as information about knee pain or managing your mental health), but do not give out personal details like your name, address, date of birth, passwords or bank details.

Scary news

Sometimes, the results from a Google search may suggest a serious or even life-threatening condition. If you search for a symptom online and find something worrying, **do not panic**.

Many symptoms of common illnesses can also be symptoms of something more serious. It is always good to check with your doctor or healthcare professional before you trust the internet's diagnosis.

If you are ever in doubt about what you have read online, visit your GP or pharmacist for advice.