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## Finding Good Health Information on the Internet

### 1. What is “Good” Information?

Before you start looking for information you need to know how to decide what information is reliable, and what information is not. This is even more important when you will be using the information to make health decisions.

See “*Is this what I want?*” for help evaluating information at [www.prhc.on.ca/womenshealth/site%20Documents/WhatIWant.pdf](http://www.prhc.on.ca/womenshealth/site%20Documents/WhatIWant.pdf), or try these other resources:

#### **A User’s Guide to Finding and Evaluating Health Info on the Web**

Medical Library Association

[www.mlanet.org/resources/userguide.html](http://www.mlanet.org/resources/userguide.html)

Information about finding, evaluating, and understanding health information on the internet. Includes MLA “top ten recommended sites” lists, and links to “real language” definitions of medical terminology.

#### **Women Wading Through the Web; A Health Toolkit**

[www.womenshealthmatters.ca/toolkit/index.html](http://www.womenshealthmatters.ca/toolkit/index.html)

From Women’s Health Matters, a health information website created by the Women’s College Hospital, the Toolkit gives you tips, tools, and advice about looking for, finding, and evaluating health information on the internet. There is also a collection of links to good sources, and space for readers to chat about their experiences with health info on the internet.

#### **NOAH (New York Online Access to Health) – Understanding and Evaluating Medical Information**

[www.noah-health.org/en/ebm/](http://www.noah-health.org/en/ebm/)

Information about what Evidence Based Medicine is, evaluating health information, evidence for consumers, patient safety, evaluating medical news, etc.

## **Just the facts ma'am...; A Women's Guide to Understanding Evidence about Health and Health Care**

[www.cewh-cesf.ca/PDF/health\\_reform/evidenceEN.pdf](http://www.cewh-cesf.ca/PDF/health_reform/evidenceEN.pdf)

A booklet covering some questions women should ask about health care evidence: Who carries out, funds and benefits from the research? How is the research problem defined? Who and what is counted? What is missing? Who are the "experts"? How does evidence inform health care decisions and health policy? What other factors are at work?

## **How to Evaluate Health Information on the Internet: Questions and Answers**

[www.cancer.gov/cancertopics/factsheet/Information/internet](http://www.cancer.gov/cancertopics/factsheet/Information/internet)

The title says it all. From the National Cancer Institute.

## **Web Sites You Can Trust: The CAPHIS Top 100 List**

<http://caphis.mlanet.org/consumer/index.html>

100 health information sites recommended by the Consumer and Patient Health Information Section of the Medical Library Association.

## **Evaluating Health Information on the Internet**

[www.bchealthguide.org/healthfiles/hfile84.stm](http://www.bchealthguide.org/healthfiles/hfile84.stm)

Criteria for evaluating information plus links to other sources, and to the BC HealthGuide Online.

## **Health on the Net Code of Conduct**

[www.hon.ch/HONcode/Conduct.html](http://www.hon.ch/HONcode/Conduct.html)

The criteria by which the Health on the Net Foundation evaluates health information web sites.

## **The Quality Information Checklist**

[www.quick.org.uk/menu.htm](http://www.quick.org.uk/menu.htm)

Intended for kids looking at information on the internet. Easy to understand, with examples, nice "click-through" format.

Now that you know what makes a good source of health information, here are ways to find that information:

## **2. First, figure out:**

### **1. Your Question:**

What you actually need to find out.

For instance: “What are the treatment options for migraine?”

### **2. Your Key Concepts:**

The important parts of your question.

For instance: treatment options, migraine

### **3. Your Variations:**

Any other words, spellings, phrases etc. that a book, website, or other resource might use instead of your Key Concepts.

#### *Kinds of Variations:*

*Other forms of words you already have:* camp, camper, camping, camps

*Related words:* measure, assess, evaluate, test, appraise

*Synonyms:* train, prepare, educate

*Other spellings:* colour, color

*More or less specific terms:* tumor, cancer, lung cancer

For instance:

Migraine(s), headache(s), treatment(s), medication(s), medicine(s), therapy/therapies, supplement(s), prevention(s) etc.

Your Key Concepts and Variations are the words you will search for. You will find other good words and phrases to add to this list as you search – it is not written in stone.

### 3. Good Places to Start

Before you start “Googling” try some starting places. Not all of the information on the internet can be found using search engines, and not all of what you find using a search engine will be “good” information. These starting places can help you to find good things that you might not have found otherwise.

#### **Virtual Reference Library**

[www.virtualreferencelibrary.ca/](http://www.virtualreferencelibrary.ca/)

From the Toronto Public Library, the VRL allows you to search or browse library collections and internet resources on just about any subject.

#### **Health and Wellness Resource Centre** through *your public library*

[www.peterborough.library.on.ca/](http://www.peterborough.library.on.ca/)

The Ontario government has purchased one year subscriptions to a number of electronic databases, including one focusing on health information. You can use this database to access articles from books, newspapers, magazines and journals. At the Peterborough Public Library, you will find the Health and Wellness Resource Centre under “Health” in the “Online Databases” section.

#### **Healthy Ontario .com**

[www.healthyontario.com/Home.htm](http://www.healthyontario.com/Home.htm)

From the Government of Ontario, this site has health information, including drug information, as well as info on OHIP and other programs of the Ministry of Health.

#### **Health Canada**

[www.hc-sc.gc.ca](http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca)

Information on general and ‘popular’ health concerns (i.e. bird flu) as well as on Health Canada and the Ministry of Health.

#### **Women’s Health Matters**

[www.womenshealthmatters.ca](http://www.womenshealthmatters.ca)

Health information for women from the Women’s College Hospital in Toronto – includes information about books, websites etc. on a wide variety of health topics.

#### **Medline Plus**

<http://medlineplus.gov>

“Trusted health information for You.” “A service of the National Library of Medicine and the National Institutes of Health.”

#### 4. Next: Searching... Using a Search Engine (Google, Yahoo! Search, Ask.com, Live Search, Healix, WebMD...etc.)

- **Look at the Help page.** Search engines work differently; there should be a Help page to tell you how to use the search engine you are looking at.
- **Use your Key Concepts and Variations.** Different websites may use different words or terms to talk about your subject. If you only use one word or phrase you will only get the results that contain that word or phrase. Some search engines will automatically search for related terms, but this does not guarantee that you are getting everything.
- **Use links and directories when you find them.** You may be directed to something you wouldn't have otherwise found.
- **Keep track of useful words and phrases that come up.** Add them to your Key Concepts and Variations list, you may get your best results using terms you find this way.
- **Get familiar with "Advanced Searching".** Generally search engines (and many websites) will have an "advanced search" option that allows you to tell the search engine what you want more specifically. Different engines will have different options that will work in different ways, so you will have to play around to learn how best to make use of these features.
- **Avoid typos and incorrect spelling.** Most of the time search engines are forgiving about spelling. However to ensure your best results it is a good idea to make sure that you haven't misspelled anything, or transposed or inserted letters (health instead of health, 20006 instead of 2006) etc.
- **Be as specific as possible.** If you are looking for a fibromyalgia support group in Peterborough Ontario, search for "fibromyalgia support group Peterborough Ontario", not "fibromyalgia". This way you know right away if there is a page that has the exact information you are looking for, instead of looking for what you actually want hidden among thousands of pages that you don't want. **If you don't find anything you can start cutting terms out until you do find something.**
- **Keep track of what you have tried and what kind of success you had.** This will prevent you from repeating the same thing over and over. It will also help you to figure out which strategies are working so you can concentrate on them, and abandon the unsuccessful ones.
- **Practice, Practice, Practice!** The more you do it the better you will be.
- **Try Boolean Searching and Search Math.** What on earth is Boolean Searching and Search Math?

## Boolean Searching and Search Math

Boolean and Search Math Operators are tools that you can use to find better results. Different search engines / search boxes on websites will use these differently. Usually you can find out which operators will work by looking at the help page, or by using the advanced search option. It is becoming less and less necessary to know Boolean and Search Math, but they still come in handy.

These are the most common operators and how they usually work.

- AND, +      women AND diabetes  
              women + diabetes  
              Finds pages with both words.  
              Most search engines do this automatically.
- OR            training OR education  
              Finds pages with at least one of these words.  
              Puts your Variables to good use – search more than one of them at a time.
- NOT, -      cancer NOT breast  
              cancer – breast  
              Finds pages with “cancer” but not with “breast” or “breast cancer”.  
              In my experience, this isn’t always a successful command, but it can be helpful when pages you are not interested in keep appearing in your results.
- “”            “relaxation breathing”  
              Binds a phrase together as if it is one word. Finds pages with these exact words in this exact order.  
              Very helpful when the individual words of the phrase you are searching for often appear separately on pages about topics you are not interested in.
- ( )            women AND (migraine OR headache)  
              Finds any page either containing women and migraine or containing women and headache.  
              ( ) allows you to build more complex searches, and make good use of your Variables. ( ) is not available on every search tool – check the help page to find out if you can use it.

These are the basics, and are the ones that are most likely to work in most places (though not all).

More information about searching:

### **Bare Bones 101: A basic tutorial on searching the web**

[www.sc.edu/beaufort/library/pages/bones/bones.shtml](http://www.sc.edu/beaufort/library/pages/bones/bones.shtml)

20 lessons on using the internet to find information (but if you just want some quick tips skip to lesson 7). Created by the Library Director at the University of South Carolina Beaufort campus.

### **Basic Internet Searching and Advanced Internet Searching**

[www.lib.montana.edu/~notess/li/basicsearch.html](http://www.lib.montana.edu/~notess/li/basicsearch.html)

[www.lib.montana.edu/~notess/li/advancedsearch.html](http://www.lib.montana.edu/~notess/li/advancedsearch.html)

Three lessons each with exercises on search tools and search strategies etc. Created and supported by an MSU Reference Librarian.

### **Finding Information on the Internet: A Tutorial**

[www.lib.berkeley.edu/TeachingLib/Guides/Internet/FindInfo.html](http://www.lib.berkeley.edu/TeachingLib/Guides/Internet/FindInfo.html)

This site is part of the UC Berkeley Library's Internet Workshops. Provides information about the internet, getting ready to search, search strategies, search tools, evaluating web sites, etc.

### **Internet Searching Tools**

[www.sou.edu/library/searchtools/](http://www.sou.edu/library/searchtools/)

In its own words: "The following tools and services are designed for searching the Internet for sites and resources. Note: These tools are ranked based on their interface, versatility, and ease of use. The How to Search the Internet provides useful tools to learn about Internet searching. The Best of the Rest provides an eclectic list of other useful resources for a variety of Internet searching needs." From the Lenn and Dixie Hannon Library, Southern Oregon University.

### **Internet Tutorials**

[www.internettutorials.net/](http://www.internettutorials.net/)

This site is maintained by a Librarian from University at Albany, SUNY. Has information about the internet, doing internet research, searching the internet, search engines, subject directories, selecting internet tools (search engine, directory, etc.), Boolean searching etc.

### **Search Engine Showdown; a User's Guide to Web Searching**

[www.searchengineshowdown.com/](http://www.searchengineshowdown.com/)

Information about searching, search engines, etc. News, reviews, features, tips etc.