



live healthy

Paging Dr. Google

About eight million Americans search the Internet daily for health information, according to a survey from the Pew Internet & American Life Project, but only 15 percent of Internet surfers remember to check the source and date of the content they find. "Most doctors are happy to have a patient bring them new study results, but the material needs to be trustworthy and up to date," says Peter Salgo, M.D., associate director of surgical intensive care at New York-Presbyterian Hospital. Here, how to tell what's legit.

1. QUESTION THE SOURCE. Read the "about us" or "contact information" section to see where the site's authors are getting their information. "It's also important to know who's funding the site. If it's a group that stands to benefit financially, such as a drug company, look at what's presented critically," says Célia Boyer, executive director of the Health on the Net (HON) Foundation, an independent nonprofit organization that promotes quality health care.

2. LOOK FOR A SEAL OF APPROVAL. The Health on the Net Foundation's HONcode and a certificate from URAC, a nonprofit organization that evaluates health care, are signs that a Web site has been vetted to meet basic criteria for ethics and accuracy. Visit healthonnet.org or urac.org to find approved sites.

3. GO FOR GOLD-STANDARD RESEARCH. Footnotes and links to sites ending in .gov or .edu that give you access to university- or government-sponsored studies ensure that you're getting tested information, says Dr. Salgo. Study results from journals such as the *New England Journal of Medicine* are also trustworthy.

4. BEWARE OF SITES MAKING CLAIMS THAT SOUND TOO GOOD TO BE TRUE. Red flags include the phrase "despite what most doctors think." If you have questions, ask your doctor for suggestions of other places to get information.

—Jacqui Detwiler