“KNOW YOUR SOURCE”

Getting reliable and current health information is not as simple as putting a search in Google. Any website that offers consumer health information should meet some basic standards. Below is a list of questions you should find answers to BEFORE you trust your health to the information on the website.

1. **Who is responsible for the website?**
   The website should list its creators, sponsors and funders. Look for a section called “About Us”, “Who We Are”, “Our Company” or something like that. Non-profit organizations and governments often contain more reliable, unbiased information. Hospitals and disease-specific groups like the Canadian Cancer Society are also reliable sources.

   *Tip: Be cautious when you read vague statements like, “This site was created by a group of doctors to answer your questions on diabetes.” Be sure to ask: Who are the doctors? To whom do they report? Are they trying to sell you something? Look for clues such as a product that is mentioned frequently, an online store, extravagant claims or a lot of testimonials with little proof behind them.*

2. **What is the purpose of the website?**
   Try to find a clear statement about its purpose. Look for a short summary of the purpose on the homepage or in the “About Us” section or under headings like: “Our Mission”, “Goals”, or “Our History”.

3. **Can I understand the website?**
   There should be a statement about who the website is intended for; age group, gender, or culture. What level of vocabulary is used, how much medical terminology is there that isn’t explained? Does it clearly say the information is for consumers/patients or is it for healthcare professionals?

4. **Is the information accurate, objective and trustworthy?**
   Is the information based on research? Are the names of authors and their credentials listed? Does the site explain the reasons for developing and sharing the information? Does the site state that the information should not be taken as health advice or as a substitute for visiting a health professional? (You will usually find this in the “Terms of Use” section.)

5. **How current is the information?**
   At the bottom of the home page there will be a “Copyright symbol” or the word Copyright with a year. That year should be the current year. There might also be a “Last
updated ....” and a date; updates should preferably be less than 6 months old and never more than a year.

6. **Does the website respect my privacy?**

At the bottom of the homepage there should also be a tab for the website’s “Privacy Policy”. Take the time to read this to make sure that none of the information you enter is shared. There should also be a statement about not adding your contact information to any published or sold lists. Err on the side of caution and refrain from entering personal information on any website you do not know.

**This information was produced as "Women Wading through the Web; A Health Toolkit" and reviewed by women’s health experts at Women’s College Hospital in Toronto.**

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