

Evaluation Checklist for Health Websites

Source: The source of health information is one of the most important criteria to determine its quality and credibility.

- What kind of a site is it (.org, .edu, .com, etc.)? Is the domain appropriate for the content?
- Is the site someone's personal page (~ or %; geocities, aol.com; etc.)?
- Does the site display the name/logo of the institution or organization responsible for the providing & maintaining the information? Who is the publisher? (usually the first part of the URL: www.**publisher**/)
- Does the site display the author's name, if relevant? Can you find the qualifications or credentials of the author? Can authors/editors be contacted by phone or email for further information?
- Why was the site created; what is its purpose? Is there an "about us" section? If so, is there disclosure of sponsorship, goals, mission?

Accuracy:

- Does the site have a "seal of approval" from a credible individual or group or has the information been subject to review? Is the review process described?
- Is there evidence for any claims being made? Testimonials are not evidence.
- Are sources of content cited? Can it be verified?
- Does the content appear to be balanced?
- Is there a disclaimer that notes that the content is informational only, and not meant to be medical advice?

Authority:

- Is the author an authority on the subject? What are her/his qualifications?
- If the author's qualifications are not listed, is the web page posted in a usually authoritative place (e.g., National Institutes of Health)?

Bias:

- Does the author bring any biases in posting the information?
- Who paid for the website?

Currency:

- Is the date on which the original information is based displayed? Is the date of posting on the web displayed? Are there any revision dates?
- Is the information likely to change?
- Is the information recent enough to be useful?

Coverage:

- How does the information compare with other sources on the same topic?
- Is a better source available?

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS:

Links:

- Are the links from the site high quality?

Design:

- Is the site logically organized for easy navigation?
- Does the information reflect the reading level of the user?
- Is there a search capability for searching the website?

Further Evaluation Criteria

- .gov and .edu sites are among the best sources for scientifically sound health and medical information. Others may have marketing, social, or political agendas that influence the material they offer and links they provide.
- Be aware, even when the site links to other “good” sites. Many sites, such as government websites, do not require permission for linking. Links may be used to provide legitimacy.
- Copyright date might not be a reliable indication of when the information was posted.
- Multimedia can be used to explain medical conditions, but it is not a substitute for explanation. Bells and whistles should not substitute for scientifically sound information.
- If a site charges a fee, be sure it offers value for the money. See whether the same information is available without a fee.
- Information should always be weighed against what might be the intent of the information provider.
- Don’t rely on information that only appears in one source. Look for “second opinions.”
- Always use common sense. Even good health and medical information may not be appropriate for individual patients. Professional advice and interpretation is always necessary.

Adapted from *FDA Consumer, June 1996*, and California Medical Association recommendations.