

# Finding trustworthy health information online

It seems like every other week we hear about a new buzzy diet or miracle health food. When news and shock-worthy headlines constantly bombard us, knowing what and who to trust can feel difficult and overwhelming. However, turning to the internet can lead to more questions than answers. Many of those answers can be misleading and untrustworthy. Social media constantly tells us what to eat, what to take, and how to exercise. Unfortunately, much of that advice is not grounded in scientific findings. So, how can we tell what's true and what's not? Here's what to keep in mind.

**1. Look for experts not influencers.** When we want a clear answer about a health question, it is important to listen to experts. Experts are professionals who have had education and training within specific knowledge areas. They typically have educational credentials or are part of professional organizations that have standards and a code of ethics. Influence, on the other hand, happens by word of mouth and often becomes a ripple effect through our peers and companions. Although it isn't always a negative to be "influenced," influencers have become a marketing tool for brands and groups. They are not always a reliable resource when it comes to health information.

**2. Look for red flags.** In our world of social media and fast, new information, websites often misinterpret health information for a flashy headline. Usually, influencers rely on a constant presence on social platforms delivering content and messages. This can result in quoting facts from questionable sources. They also might share information about what a medical professional said is best for their own body, which can differ from other bodies. You might find a social media article that has some facts that seems to address a concern about your own health. However, if the author is pushing a product or service promising a cure or certain result, this is a definite red flag.

**3. What to look for.** Now that you know what to avoid, here are some signs that you can trust information. Look for quotes, or even better whole articles, from an R.D. (Registered Dietitian) or an M.D. (Medical Doctor). Look for citations and links to reliable sources such as peer-reviewed science journals or .gov and .edu websites. When information is so readily available, finding a few people or sites you can regularly trust is the best way to get health advice. Make sure there is research to back up health claims or advice. That way you can tell facts from possibly false or exaggerated claims. When in doubt, double check with your own health-care provider.

It is important to share facts and not opinions. Find ways to filter information to make sure you stay healthy, while sharing correct information with your friends and family.

## Reference:

Garden-Robinson, J. (2019, February). Nourish your mind and body with accurate health information how to sort fact from fiction. North Dakota State University. <https://www.ag.ndsu.edu/publications/health-fitness/nourish-your-mind-and-body-with-accurate-health-informationhow-to-sort-fact-from-fiction>

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