

Lifelines™

from the National Cancer Institute



Evaluating Cancer Information on the Internet

By the National Cancer Institute

If you or a family member receives a cancer diagnosis you will likely be looking for information about the disease. Or you may be interested in ways to prevent cancer or want information about how a certain cancer affects the African American community. These days, the Internet is increasingly used as a source for all types of information, including cancer information. A recent study by the Pew Research Center shows that 80% of Internet users, or 59% of U.S. adults, look online for health information.¹

The development of smartphone technology and its rise in popularity has also increased Internet use among minorities. [African Americans are more likely to own a mobile device than whites and, of those with mobile Internet devices, more likely to do the majority of their online browsing on the device: 51% for non-Hispanic blacks compared to 24% for whites.

The popularity of the Internet for information is no surprise since it can give instant access to information on almost any topic, such as cancer. On many websites you can now find basic facts about certain types of cancer, locate current clinical trials, and find support in dealing with cancer. You can also get information on the latest research advances, find doctors and hospitals, look up cancer treatment guidelines and drug information, and find out about complementary and alternative medicine. You can even get information that is tailored for African Americans.

When getting information online, however, especially health information, you should be careful. There are many different sources of information on the Internet - expert health organizations, government agencies, universities, merchants, interest groups, and the general public. Most of these organizations and individuals are trying to offer accurate information that will genuinely help you.

But because anyone can post information on the Internet, some people may be passing along information that is wrong, whether by accident or on purpose. So it is important to know how to separate the facts from the myths, or “urban legends.”

The National Cancer Institute (NCI), which is the federal government's principal agency for cancer research and training, has developed some simple “checklist” questions to ask yourself when you are searching the Internet to help determine whether you should trust the information you find³.

1. Who manages this information?
2. Who is paying for the project, and what is their purpose?
3. What is the original source of the information that is posted?
4. How is information reviewed before it gets posted?
5. How current is the information?
6. If they are asking for personal information, how will they use that information and how will they protect your privacy?

Learn more about evaluating Internet information by visiting the NCI website (<http://www.cancer.gov/cancertopics/cancerlibrary/health-info-online>), where you can also watch a Federal Trade Commission video that describes how to be a careful consumer of online health information.

For other resources on evaluating health information on the Internet, visit:

- Federal Trade Commission (FTC): Cure-ious? Ask. <http://www.ftc.gov/curious>
- Food and Drug Administration (FDA): For Consumers: Protecting Yourself. <http://www.fda.gov/ForConsumers/ProtectYourself/default.htm>
- American Cancer Society: Cancer Information on the Internet. <http://www.cancer.org/Cancer/CancerBasics/cancer-information-on-the-internet>

NCI leads the National Cancer Program and the NIH effort to dramatically reduce the burden of cancer and improve the lives of cancer patients and their families, through research into prevention and cancer biology, the development of new interventions, and the training and mentoring of new researchers For more information about cancer, please visit the NCI web site at www.cancer.gov (or m.cancer.gov from your mobile device) or call NCI's Cancer Information Service at 1-800-4-CANCER (1-800-422-6237). More articles and videos in the culturally relevant Lifelines series are available at www.cancer.gov/lifelines.