



ONLINE MEDICAL RESOURCES

It is important to know how to look up medical resources online effectively. For a non-medical person it can be overwhelming and sometimes lead to [Cyberchondria*](#). Below are some guidelines, tips and examples of various medical resources:

What to look out for:	
Who are the authors?	Are they qualified healthcare professionals or an online community? Check the ‘about us’ section and if there’s a mission statement that shows the intention of the authors.
How is the website funded?	Is it dependant on government, charity or advertising? If it’s advertising check if there’s a policy on paid advertising.
What is the editorial process	How is the information checked and verified? There should be information available on the editorial team and/or the editorial process
What is the purpose of the website	Is it to provide information to help people with genuine health concerns or to sell a product?
Currency	How often is the information updated? Medical information should be updated on a regular basis. You will usually find when a website was last updated on the bottom of the page.
Some top Tips:	
Be sceptical	Don’t believe everything you read. A lot of online ‘medical advice’ isn’t from medical professionals. Even if it is it’s more likely for a general audience and not for a specific case.
Don’t let paranoia dominate you	Most signs and symptoms are not exclusive to one disease. So having a headache doesn’t mean you have a brain tumour.
Take the common sense approach	Online searching can be good if you want to learn about different medical conditions or how to prevent them. It is not good for self-diagnosis. If you do need something diagnosed it is best to see a doctor.
Don’t rely on Dr. Google	Googling symptoms can produce a vast range of results that can be hard to filter. It is best to start off on a more trustworthy resource first such as from the NHS.

What online medical resources are available?

Type of Resource	How credible is it?	Some examples
Online community forums	These sites can be valuable to some people because they serve as online self-help groups, usually for people with a particular health condition that are looking for mutual support. However, users should take note that the information does not come from healthcare professionals and may not be relevant to their individual case.	https://www.cancer.ie/community https://patient.info/forums
Government Sponsored/ Non-Profit/Medical Organisations	These are the most reliable medical resources as information is usually provided by medical experts. It can be a good starting point and allows for more shared decision making between patients and their doctors.	http://www.hse.ie/eng/health/az/ https://medlineplus.gov/ www.undertheweather.ie http://www.nhs.uk/pages/home.aspx http://www.mayoclinic.org/
Disease Specific Organisations	These organisations can provide information about specific diseases or health conditions. A lot of information can help from a preventative point of view such as advice on diets, exercise etc.	www.cancer.ie www.irishheart.ie http://www.mariekeating.ie/ www.diabetes.ie
Health Insurance Companies	Can include information on a wide range of health topics and is provided specifically for members.	https://www.vhiblog.ie/ https://www.layahealthcare.ie http://www.nhs.uk/pages/home.aspx
Commercial	These websites mainly depend on advertising for their revenue. While information can come from medical experts, care needs to be taken as some advertisers will try to promote their product as a treatment option.	http://www.webmd.com/

Important:

Health conditions can change quickly so advice from any medical resource should not replace the advice or assessment of a healthcare professional.

*Unfounded anxiety concerning the state of one's health brought on by visiting health and medical websites