

By Lorraine Chalmers, R.N.

Searching the Internet for reliable health information can be challenging with the vast volume of data available at the click of a mouse. At the bottom of this page you will find links to 2 websites. One takes you to an excellent tutorial on how to safely search for reputable health information. The other is a link to a collection of reputable health websites.

Why you might search for health information usually falls into 2 categories: **Personal or Professional**.

**Personal** reasons for searching health information could be out of random interest in a certain health condition or to look up data regarding a new issue or concern for you, a family member, or a friend.

If you are looking for health data in a **Professional** setting, meaning you are professionally responsible for the care and well being of another either via **direct care** or providing **health teaching**, your role carries much more weight ethically and legally. If you are a Regulated Care Provider or a Licensed Care Provider, you are also responsible to your professional body.

So how do you know the site you are looking at is credible?

You can usually find out a lot of information about the type of website you are going to before you even open it, just by the **Domain Name**. Often a site will have its company name in the domain name. What the name ends with is also often very telling. Domain names are chosen by the company or person creating the website and are not regulated. The following applies to the majority of websites:

- .com = commercial address usually "for profit"
- .net = usually for "network" related domain
- .org = generally "not for profit organization"
- .edu = "educational institution" i.e. college or university
- .gov = US government
- .ca = Canadian (alone may be a for profit business) ie walmart.ca
- .gov.on.ca = government of Ontario
- .gov.ca = government of Canada

When you are looking online for **trustworthy** Health Information, you need to know:

- Where did this site come from? Who owns it? What is their objective in creating it?
- Who contributes the information and what are their credentials? How current is this information? How often is the site updated?
- How do they get paid or maintain the site financially? What do they want from me?
- What are they going to do with my personal information?

Most of this information can be found when you open a website and click on "**ABOUT**" or "**SITE MAP**" at the top or bottom of the home page.

For more detailed information, please go to the following 2 websites underlined: `

**"Evaluating Internet Health Information: A Tutorial from the National Library of Medicine"** This is about 16 minutes long and strongly recommended. Just **"Ctrl click"** on the following which will direct you to the above tutorial

<http://www.torontopubliclibrary.ca/search.jsp?Ntt=Evaluating+Internet+Health+Information>

**For a great collection of recommended health websites from A-Z, age specific and in multiple languages:**

**"Ctrl click"** <http://www.torontopubliclibrary.ca/search.jsp?N=37868+4293013254>

Go to the drop box on the left side marked "Website Category" and choose your health topic from A-Z

Remember, you are responsible for the care you provide therefore you need to ensure that your information is accurate.