



One-Click Cures

Everyone's hitting websites, chat rooms, and apps for health advice these days. Make sure you're getting truly good insta-info with our look at all that's helpful, trustworthy, and new.

By JENNIFER ABBASI



WE'RE BECOMING A NATION OF DIY doctors: A whopping 80 percent of Internet users have turned to the Web for health help, according to a survey by the Pew Research Center. "We take it for granted that you can, for instance, look up the side effects for a prescription on your mobile device as the pharmacist fills your order, but this instant access to digital health information now is pretty remarkable," notes Betsy Humphreys, deputy director of the U.S. National Library of Medicine at the National Institutes of Health. So, where to go for the best advice? We've got the scoop.

7 ways to find good health tips online

1. DO A BETTER SEARCH

Bookmark sites that are affiliated with trusted sources, like our own Health.com—that way, you know the articles are well researched and up-to-date. Avoid doing broad searches; Google "knee pain" and you'll get about 30 million results. "The drawback of a general search, whether you need quick help for a burn on your hand or more insight into a just-diagnosed allergy, is you get a mix of information, some of which could be inaccurate

or irrelevant," says Lisa Gualtieri, PhD, an assistant professor at Tufts University School of Medicine, who specializes in tech and health. Tack on "site:.gov" or "site:.edu" to your search term to find sites run by government offices and academic institutions. Top ones include the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (cdc.gov), MedlinePlus (nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus), and Harvard Medical School (health.harvard.edu). For a list of links, visit Health.com/trusted-sites.

2. SET UP E-SUBSCRIPTIONS

"We're seeing an evolution from patients searching for information online to information finding patients," says Bryan Vartabedian, MD, a Houston doctor who writes 33charts.com. Sign up for a Google Alert on any topic, and an email with links will show up daily, weekly, or as

new content is available (your choice). You can also pick the media sources, like news outlets or videos. Be sure to click on “only the best results.”

3. READ TILL THE END

Lists of symptoms that ran from general to specific (and vice versa) were more likely to make healthy people think they were at higher risk for cancer, compared with lists that mixed the order of general symptoms (like fatigue) and illness-specific signs, finds a recent study in *Psychological Science*. Order varies by site, so read it all. “I sometimes Web-surf myself into thinking I’m sick,” admits Betsy Flanagan, 38, of New Haven, Connecticut. “I recently thought I had cervical cancer after reading up on itchiness, and made a doctor appointment in a panic. Turns out it was a yeast problem and I just needed more probiotics in my diet.” Notes David Katz, MD, director of the Yale University Prevention Research Center, “Almost anyone with almost any symptom can find a dreadful

disease online to match it. Explore and investigate, but discuss findings with your doctor.”

4. REACH OUT TO PROS

Follow your health-care providers on Twitter. For more good health tweeps, click on “Browse categories” in the “Who to follow” section. “Feel free to ask questions—you get to interact with people you might not connect with in daily life,” says Claire Díaz-Ortiz, Twitter’s social innovation manager and author of *Twitter for Good*. (OK, Dr. Andrew Weil may not respond, but a celeb trainer might.) At new site healthtap.com, users can submit questions to doctors and browse answers.

5. DO A VIRTUAL OFFICE VISIT

Video-chat with a doc at 11:30 p.m. about your sinus attack? It’s possible on sites like Teladoc. At NowClinic, you can log on 24/7 to interact with a licensed MD—typically internists and family physicians—regarding nonemergency issues (\$45 for 10 minutes). Video



Friend Your Doc?!

Yes, it’s happening: 33 percent of doctors have gotten Facebook friend requests from patients, and about a quarter accepted, per a QuantiaMD survey. The American Medical Association does not approve. Safety is one concern, notes David Fleming, MD, chair of the American College of Physicians’ ethics committee: “When doctors respond to messages at home, there’s potential for impaired judgment because medical records may not be available.” Then there’s the whole TMI thing. Best bet? Don’t go there.

visits may be helpful for those who live far from health care, or those with after-hours problems. These docs can prescribe only nonnarcotics, such as antibiotics.

6. SCORE INSIDER HELP

To trade notes with other cyber-dwellers, hit healthcentral.com or mdjunction.com. Or check curetogether.com and patientslikeme.com, which gather user-shared data, then compile reports anyone can browse. “Even though my doctor told me about side effects of migraine medication,” says Erika Boehm, 45, of Dublin, California, “the worry lessened when I read it hasn’t been a problem for most people.”

7. GO FOR E-RECORDS

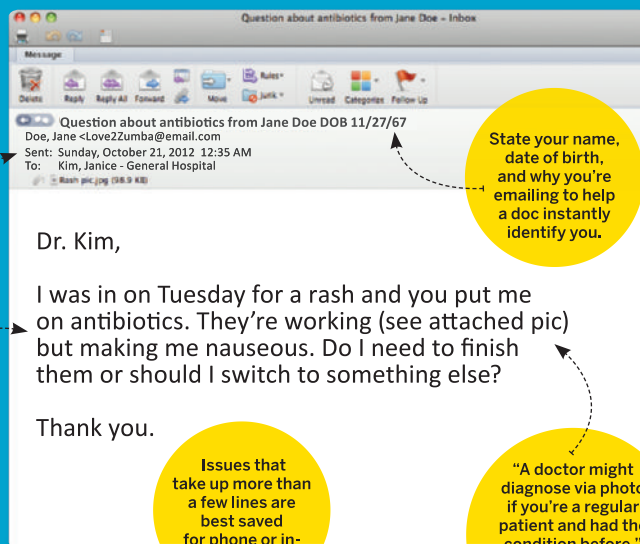
More than half of U.S. physicians have switched to electronic health records (EHR). Besides the quick access to data, “EHR is an easy way for doctors to share visit summaries with patients to see if they have questions—much more enabling than notes in a chart,” says Stephanie Moore, MD, medical director at Harvard’s Center for Connected Health. They’re good checkpoints, too: 41 percent of docs

How to Write an Email to Your Doctor

First, ask if your physician is open to email, recommends Ronald Epstein, MD, director of the Center for Communication and Disparities Research at the University of Rochester Medical Center. Then know what to put (and not put) in your message:

The beauty of email? You can send it anytime. But don’t expect an answer ASAP (and know that a nurse may be fielding questions).

Stick with small issues: “A patient once emailed on Friday afternoon before a long weekend about chest pains,” Dr. Epstein says. “I didn’t see it until Tuesday! Fortunately everything was fine.”



State your name, date of birth, and why you’re emailing to help a doc instantly identify you.

Issues that take up more than a few lines are best saved for phone or in-person chats.

“A doctor might diagnose via photo if you’re a regular patient and had the condition before,” says Ted Eytan, MD, of Kaiser Permanente.

E-SOURCES THE PROS LOVE

APP FAVES

CSPI Chemical Cuisine

"You can look up unfamiliar food ingredients—you know, the ones with 10 syllables that you can't pronounce—on your smartphone right in the grocery store."

—Joy Bauer, RD, nutritionist, Today show

UMSkinCheck

"It lets you photograph moles so you'll spot changes over time, and gives instructions and reminders for checks." —Jeffrey Benabio, MD, Kaiser Permanente

Cardio

"Instead of a heart-rate monitor, I use this; it takes your pulse by using your phone camera to gauge light reflected off your face. Accurate and fun!" —Leslie Horn, staff writer, gizmodo.com

Lumosity Brain Trainer

"It's a series of games to exercise your brain. I use it whenever I have a free moment!"

—Jim Sears, MD, co-host, The Doctors

Relax with Andrew Johnson Lite

"A hypnotherapist with a soothing Scottish brogue talks you through relaxing—like a human sleeping pill with no side effects." —Camille Chatterjee, Health Deputy Editor

BLOG FAVES

healthycookingcamp.com

"The hosts make cooking accessible and fun. Love the orange and walnut quinoa salad."

—Kristin McGee, Health columnist

well.blogs.nytimes.com

"It explains and educates and also has interesting perspectives, like whether you can



really train yourself to be a morning person." —Suzanne Steinbaum, DO, Lenox Hill Hospital in New York City

runblogger.com

"By a professor who teaches physiology—it has fresh insights, like whether to copy the form of elite runners." —David Kirsch, celeb trainer

TWITTER FAVES

@JanetHelm

"She tweets great information, such as encouraging people to quit thinking they're 'cheating' on

diets." —Ellie Krieger, RD, host, Cooking Channel's Healthy Appetite

@DrOz

"You remember his tips! A favorite: One portion of whole-grain pasta is about light-bulb size." —Andrea Smith, lifestyle editor, mashable.com

@JeanetteJenkins

"This trainer's so inspiring. Visualize goals, she tweeted: 'There is power in your vision.'"

—Rozalynn Frazier, Health Assistant Fitness Editor

—Leslie Barrie

who use EHRs report being alerted to possible medication errors. One downside: "People complain they're looking at the side of a doctor's head while he enters data as they're talking!" Dr. Moore says. "Speak up, absolutely, if the doctor's distracted."

3 ways not to find health tips online

1. GETTING SUCKED INTO A PSEUDO-HEALTH SITE

Some have a secret agenda—peddling supplements or other wellness products—and it's often unclear it's a company-backed site. If the text sounds one-sided, it probably is.

2. FALLING FOR OLD NEWS

"Outdated information can have incorrect advice, like recommending medication pulled from the market," Humphreys says. Check for a date.

3. VISITING ONLY DR. GOOGLE

"A diagnosis is something a doctor and patient arrive at *together*, based on information from the patient, an exam, and sometimes tests," says Ted Eytan, MD, of Kaiser Permanente in Washington, D.C. So before your next visit, print out info you find online and bring it to your doc; you'll get the best of both health worlds. ■

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"Can I go brush my teeth now?"




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