



Gesundheitsdepartement des Kantons Basel-Stadt

Medizinische Dienste

# Smart browsing for medical advice

TIPS TO HELP YOU USE INFORMATION OBTAINED ON THE INTERNET



HEALTH COMPASS

# PLEASE TAKE CARE WHEN BROWSING THE INTERNET FOR MEDICAL INFORMATION

A pain in the back, a persistent dry cough or occasional headaches and many people will start by turning to the internet for help. Today's search engines can deliver huge quantities of health-related information at any time of the day or night. That can help – or just make things worse! Be aware that the large volumes of health-related information available on the internet are of very varied quality and mostly unstructured. When searching on the internet, it's easy to lose sight of the big picture. One can end up feeling unnecessarily worried because even common symptoms such as a headache and bloating may be

presented as a plausible diagnosis for the gravest of illnesses. Not forgetting the risk that anyone browsing the web for medical information may fall into the trap of self-diagnosis and treatment based on erroneous information.

## How reliable is information on the internet?

You will find a list of the criteria usually associated with reliable sources on the back of this flyer. The health information website published by Canton Basel-Stadt is a good example of a trustworthy internet source.

[www.gesundheit.bs.ch](http://www.gesundheit.bs.ch)

## TIPS FROM THE CANTONAL MEDICAL OFFICER



“The weekend’s coming up, your symptoms appear to be worsening and you’re not sure if you should wait until Monday before seeing a doctor? If in doubt, don’t wait, get an appointment to see your family doctor – it will save you having to make a weekend trip to Emergency Services at your local hospital.”

“If your symptoms are serious, see your doctor or talk to someone at your local pharmacy. You can always look for more information on the internet afterwards, if need be. Discuss the information you find on the internet with medical professionals.”

“Did you know that search engines will often throw out a raft of unlikely diseases in response to the symptoms you enter? In most cases, for example, the rather vague symptom of a ‘headache’ will be due to stress or a lack of sleep. And yet the search results are likely to contain a disproportionate number of references to life-threatening problems such as a brain tumour.”



## TIPS & TRICKS when searching for medical information on the internet

- Use precise search terms.
- Use reliable specialist sources – you’ll find a checklist overleaf.
- Images can also be useful [e.g. for a skin rash].
- Be aware that searching on the internet can trigger anxiety and fear.
- **NOTE: information obtained on the internet can never replace advice from medical professionals!**

“The order in which the results appear bears no relation to the quality of the content or the likelihood of contracting the illnesses. At most, it tells us something about the number of searches for a specific term. So please be critical when looking at the links proposed.”

## HEALTH AND MEDICAL APPS



### airCheck

Check the quality of the air and the current concentrations of fine particles, ozone and nitrogen dioxide and get tips on what to do when air pollution levels increase.

▼  
for Android and iOS



### Zecke

Tick bites – what to do? Obtain advice on removing ticks and check the map to see up-to-date info on where the risk of ticks is greatest. A tick diary function will help you to monitor bites.

▼  
for Android and iOS



### SmokeFree Buddy App

Help a friend quit smoking or get some support for yourself.

▼  
for Android and iOS

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## CRITERIA FOR CHOOSING A RELIABLE, TRUSTWORTHY INTERNET SOURCE:

### Who is the author?

You'll often find this information under "Imprint" or "About Us". Be cautious if there is no address, or only a P.O. box.

### What are the goals and economic interests?

What is the purpose of the website – is the author hoping to sell something? Try to form an idea of those goals and keep them in mind.

### When was the information posted?

Note when the information was posted or last updated. As a general rule: the more specific the information, the more current it should be.

### How do you rate the quality of the information?

Is there a description of the way the medicines work and possible side effects? Is the information presented in a neutral way, or does it read more like a publicity text? Are there references to sources?

### Does the information impact on an existing doctor-patient relationship?

Whenever information is given, and particularly if self-treatment is put forward as an option, it should always be made absolutely clear that the information can never replace a doctor-patient relationship.

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2nd edition, published in: 2020