

LOGGING ON

for Children's Health Information

What to Look for on the Web

The Internet brings the world to our fingertips. For parents seeking child-related health information, no other medium offers the same breadth, depth, and convenience. However, not everything posted online would pass muster with your child's pediatrician. Some sites can simply be misleading; others contain information that is inaccurate enough to be considered dangerous.

When conducting Web-based research on your child's health, follow these basic tips:

- **Consider the source.** Content that comes from a reputable source (including sites associated with universities, notable hospitals, reputable advocacy organizations, or other entities you recognize) is likely to be reliable. "Getting health information online is different from retail shopping. It's not about getting the cheapest prices regardless of the store. It's about buying the name brand," reminds Dimitri Christakis, M.D., FAAP, director of the Center for Child Health, Behavior and Development at Seattle Children's Hospital and a member of the Executive Committee of the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) Council on Communications and Media. "There are truly millions of sites that promote or claim to provide health information for parents, and the quality really varies," he adds.
- **Identify the author.** If content is presented by an "expert," check that person's credentials to ensure he or she is qualified to deliver health advice. This can be as easy as clicking on the site's "About" button, according to Gwenn O'Keeffe, M.D., FAAP, who also serves on the Executive Committee of the AAP Council on Communications and Media. Dr. O'Keeffe is the author of a forthcoming book on cybersafety. "Is the author's credential an M.D.?" she asks. "Sometimes, people say they're doctors but they're not medical doctors. What they say may sound authoritative, but it could be that the person is just a great writer. Get your information from a true expert source."
- **Personalize your search.** Remember that the Web contains enormous amounts of information that does NOT apply to your child. So don't follow a chain of links that might lead you to believe that your child has a frightening condition when your intent is to research what are more likely to be innocent, everyday situations. Be as specific as you can be with the words you enter into search fields in order to get results that apply to your child's unique profile. "Search engines don't have any way of creating a context," says Dr. Christakis. "So if a parent searches for 'headache,' which is benign in children 99 percent of the time, it's certain that some site will raise the specter of brain cancer."
- **Visit the leading health sites.** For consistently reliable and accurate medical information, you can't go wrong with the tried-and-true pioneers of patient education. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (www.cdc.gov), the National Institutes of Health's health information portal (www.MedlinePlus.gov), and the Mayo Clinic (www.MayoClinic.com) are easy to use and written for consumer audiences. In addition, check out the AAP's parenting Web site, www.HealthyChildren.org.
- **Find advocacy groups.** Groups devoted to specific health conditions have Web sites packed with information and resources related to their subjects. In addition, you may go

At Your Fingertips: www.HealthyChildren.org

Parents now have online access to a wealth of pediatric health information via the American Academy of Pediatrics' new Web site at www.HealthyChildren.org. Packed with Academy-credentialed content (much of it pulled from an array of AAP parenting books, patient education materials, and fact sheets), the site offers parents a single source for news and advice regarding children's health.

"Everything on the site is AAP-approved, endorsed by our organization of 60,000 members," says Medical Editor Jennifer Shu, M.D., FAAP. "The AAP is the leader in the practice of pediatrics, and this is their content for parents."

The site also includes such features as:

- Answers to children's health and behavior questions for each age and stage
- Easy-to-use search functions
- An interactive "Ask the Pediatrician" area
- A pediatrician locator
- Monthly newsletters
- Opportunities for personalization based on children's ages and health profiles

Parents may also use what they find on the site as a way to open conversations with their children's pediatricians. "We're seeing it as a tool for parents and pediatricians to use during office visits to facilitate patient education," says Dr. Shu. "We want people to think of it as the gold standard of parenting information."

Parents are
always on call
And we are, too

KidsDoc—The iPhone Application
from healthychildren.org

With KidsDoc, we're always by your side, providing critical information about your child's health and well being. Whenever and wherever.

- ♥ Choose the appropriate symptom care guide
- ♥ Use the symptom chart to find the recommended action
- ♥ Help you decide when to call your doctor or treat at home

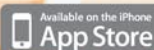


Brought to you by:

American Academy
of Pediatrics



DEDICATED TO THE HEALTH OF ALL CHILDREN™



VISIT OUR WEBSITE TO DOWNLOAD THE APP
www.healthychildren.org/kidsdoc

through these sites to find communities of patients and parents brought together by common concerns. “These are wonderful for support, and great for getting information from families about negotiating the health care system and getting second opinions,” says Dr. O’Keeffe. “Just use them cautiously, and don’t seek medical information from them. If they start to feel negative, or if it turns into a doctor-bashing session, pull out,” she cautions.

- **Visit pediatricians’ blogs.** Some doctors also post blog entries, covering a wide range of medical and behavioral topics. (Dr. O’Keeffe, for one, maintains a health information blog on her site, PediatricsNow.com.) Pediatricians’ blogs usually combine the informal style typically found in the “blogosphere” with a clinical viewpoint on the issues parents care about.
- **Visit parents’ blogs.** Web logs, or “blogs,” are great resources, especially when they’re written by fellow parents. (The same is true for social networking sites, such as Facebook and Twitter.) According to Dr. Christakis, sites that offer peer-to-peer content are appropriate places for parents to seek advice regarding non-critical issues. “When you look for everyday concerns, that’s where the blogs and the informal sites can be a fun source of information,” he says. “You just need to take what you find with a grain of salt, because the content is based entirely on anecdotes or personal opinion.”
- **Keep things in perspective.** Don’t get spellbound by the Internet and allow it to steal time that you could be spending with your

child, especially when there is no real medical problem. “I wouldn’t waste a lot of time searching online for everyday things just out of curiosity,” says Dr. O’Keeffe. “If your child has the sniffles and is not impacted by them, go about your life. We sometimes get all caught up in having to find all of this information, but there may not be a reason to do so. Your child’s doctor will let you know if it’s a concern.”

- **Strike a healthy balance.** Don’t let what you learn online replace the expertise of your pediatrician. Contact the doctor directly with specific questions or concerns, or bring your findings to your child’s next appointment. “Your doctor’s office is open 24/7, whether through email or advice lines,” says Dr. O’Keeffe. “It’s one thing to use the Internet for curiosity, but it’s another thing to use it in place of your pediatrician. That’s not what it’s there for. Your pediatrician can take what you’ve read online and apply it to your child’s real-world case.”

These days, pediatricians expect parents to use the Internet to educate themselves about their children’s health. In fact, when parents use the Web wisely, it can help make them more effective members of their children’s healthcare teams. “Activated, empowered parents create a better dialog with pediatricians, which ultimately benefits children,” states Dr. Christakis. “When parents know how to find reliable information on the Web, I’m all for it.” •