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Tips for Safely Surfing the Internet

WE ARE LIVING IN THE INFORMATION AGE. The Internet is a useful tool that allows us to keep up with friends and family, follow the news, shop, share photos, and much more—all of which can be a real benefit for an older adult. What's more, the Internet can be a convenient place to get the answers to many of your health questions, right from the comfort of your living room. But with so many health websites available, how can you find reliable advice that's safe to follow?

Fortunately, there are smart, easy steps you can take to make sure that the information you read on the Internet is accurate, safe, and based on expert advice. Here's how:

KNOW THE SOURCE (CHECK THE WEB ADDRESS)	Always look for an "about us" page on websites. This page will tell you who publishes it. The ending of a site's address can also help you identify the kind of organization that sponsors it. Websites from the federal government (*.gov*), universities (*.edu*), and major non-profit organizations (*.org*), such as the American Heart Association, the American Lung Association, and the American Cancer Association, are usually higher quality. On the other hand, sites ending in *.com* can be owned by anyone. Sites with a *.com* address should be approached with caution when used for healthcare information.
LOOK FOR THE SITE'S CONTACT INFORMATION	If a website doesn't provide an easy way to contact the organization, approach its information with caution.
WHO'S AN EXPERT?	Look for recognized experts as writers or reviewers of information on health websites. Experts may be doctors, professors, nurses, psychologists, social workers, or other professionals experienced in a particular field. Top experts will often hold university-level teaching positions.

LOOK FOR EXPERT REVIEWERS	Check the "About Us" page to see how the information is reviewed. Make sure that reviewers are experts. For example, cardiologists should review heart health information. Sites that have attorneys or lay people review the information are suspect. Also watch out for reviewers who are paid consultants for products—read any fine print on the website to look for disclosures.
CHECK THE REVIEW DATE	Health information changes rapidly. Check to see if there's a date on the page indicating when the content was last reviewed. Older information isn't necessarily useless, but websites that keep their content current will have newer information.
BE WARY	Steer clear of products or services that claim to provide miracle cures. If it sounds too good to be true, it probably is. Avoid products that contain "secret ingredients" or those "your doctor won't tell you about." You should always consult your healthcare provider before starting any new medical therapies or supplements.

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