

Your Guide to Health Misinformation

This packet helps you understand and combat false health information. It teaches you how to identify unreliable sources, debunk common myths, and make better health decisions based on facts, protecting you from dangerous misinformation.



Protect Yourself from Health Misinformation

Anyone can make a web page, video, or social media post with health-related content. It's important to check and see if you can trust the information you find online.

What is health misinformation?

Misinformation is information that is false, inaccurate, or misleading according to the best available evidence at the time.

Health misinformation can spread false claims about diseases, illnesses, potential treatments and cures, vaccines, diets, cosmetic procedures, and other health issues.

Health misinformation is harmful

False information can cause confusion and misunderstandings. It can lead people to make decisions with harmful consequences, such as using unproven and dangerous treatments.

The good news is that we can detect health misinformation and protect ourselves.

Recognize the common types of health misinformation:

- Memes (fun, colorful images or graphics) created as a joke
- Websites that look professional but have false or misleading stories
- Quotations where some parts have been deleted to change the meaning
- Cherry-picked statistics that share only a part of the data
- Misleading graphs or diagrams that don't tell the whole story
- Old images shared as if they are very recent
- Videos edited to change the meaning



How to spot health misinformation

False information can cause confusion and misunderstandings. It can lead people to make decisions with harmful consequences, such as using unproven and dangerous treatments.

The good news is that we can detect health misinformation and protect ourselves.

Ask questions if you're not sure

- Does the information make sense?
- Does the claim seem too good to be true? Does it seem unbelievable?

Check if credible websites share this information

- Type the claim into a search engine. Do credible sources share this information too?
- Check [MedlinePlus.gov](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5500281/) websites for any information about the claim.

Look at who wrote the content

- Did a health care professional or scientist write the information?
- Can you trust the person or organization who wrote the content? Type their name into a search engine to see what other people say about them.

Check for evidence

- Where does this information come from?
- Is there recent evidence to support the claim?

Talk to a credible health care professional like your doctor or nurse

- Ask if they have additional information about the health claim.
- Ask if the information applies to you.



Protect Yourself from Health Misinformation

How health misinformation spreads

Health misinformation is often posted on the internet. It can circulate through search engines, social media, and online shopping sites.

Misinformation is **not just an online problem**. False and misleading health claims can be found in speeches, pamphlets, posters, news outlets, and advertisements.

Misinformation can spread quickly because it's easy to share through word of mouth, social media, email, and text messages.

Why people share health misinformation

Health misinformation is mainly shared by people who do not know that the claims are false or misleading. They want to help others and would hate to think they're putting others at risk.

However, some people share harmful information to fool others or try to make money.

Read more about health misinformation
at [SurgeonGeneral.gov/HealthMisinformation](https://www.surgeongeneral.gov/HealthMisinformation).

Sources: [Office of the Surgeon General](#) and [National Library of Medicine](#)



How to Find Reliable Sources of Health Information

When it comes to your health, having good information is crucial. But it can be hard to pick out credible information from the millions of search results we find online.

Which sources can we trust?

Start with:

- MedlinePlus — Read up-to-date information about diseases, conditions, and wellness: medlineplus.gov
- World Health Organization — Get information on healthy living and public health emergencies: who.int

You can rely on consumer health information from:

- Johns Hopkins Health Library — johnshopkinshealthcare.staywellsolutionsonline.com
- Mayo Clinic — mayoclinic.org
- Cleveland Clinic — my.clevelandclinic.org/health

Learn about health and social services in Kansas City:

- Kansas City Health Department — kcmo.gov/city-hall/departments/health
- Jackson County Health Services — jacksongov.org/residents/health-services

Are you looking for medical research literature?

- PubMed — A search engine for biomedical literature, pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov
- Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA) — A peer-reviewed medical journal that gives access to clinical research studies, reviews, and editorials. jamanetwork.com



How to Find Reliable Sources of Health Information

Visit your local library for support

- Ask for help finding health information and books
- Get free Wi-Fi and internet access
- See resources recommended by librarians at kclibrary.org/health
- Find library locations in Kansas City at kclibrary.org/locations

Stay safe! Talk with your health care provider, like a doctor or nurse, before following health advice found online.



Help Stop the Spread of Health Misinformation

Misinformation is information that is **false, inaccurate, or misleading**, according to the best available evidence at the time. It can cause confusion and misunderstandings. It can lead people to make decisions with harmful consequences.

We can protect ourselves, our family, and our friends from health misinformation.

Spot health misinformation and avoid sharing it

Use the Surgeon General's [Health Misinformation Checklist](#) every time you come across health-related content you're unsure about.

- Did you check with a credible health information source or local public health department to see whether there is any information about the claim being made?
- Did you ask a credible health care professional, such as your doctor or nurse, if they have any additional information?
- Did you type the claim into a search engine to see if it has been verified by a credible source?
- Did you look at the “About Us” page on the website to see if you can trust the source?
- If you're not sure about the content, **DON'T SHARE!**



Talk to your family, friends, and community about health misinformation

Giving “fact-checks” to people who share false claims doesn’t always work. Try these tips instead:

- **Listen** — Try to understand their fears and beliefs.
- **Empathize** — Ask questions to understand where they’re coming from. Talk about how difficult it is to find trustworthy health information.
- **Point to credible sources** — Show them sources like [MedlinePlus](#).
- **Don’t publicly shame** — Try to have conversations one on one. Be gentle and understanding.
- **Use inclusive language** — Show that you identify with them. Try phrases like “I’ve been confused too” or “I understand.”

Encourage people to talk to their health care provider

Suggest they ask their doctor or nurse about their health concerns.

Spread the word in your community

Get your family, friends, and community groups to take positive action to stop health misinformation.

Share with them the Surgeon General’s Community Toolkit at [SurgeonGeneral.gov/HealthMisinformation](https://www.surgeongeneral.gov/HealthMisinformation).

We can stop the spread of health misinformation and build a healthier world!

Source: [Office of the Surgeon General](#)



Check if Health-Related Content Is Credible

Some of the health-related content you find online is up-to-date and reliable. But some content may be false, inaccurate, or misleading.

It's essential to evaluate a health claim you read online before you trust it.

Ask these questions to check if a health claim is credible:

Provider

- Who is in charge of the website? Can you trust them?
- Why have they created the website? Are they selling something?

Funding

- Who's paying for the website? Does the information favor a sponsor?
- Does the website have advertisements? Are they labeled as such?

Quality

- Where does the information come from? Is it based on scientific evidence or medical research?
- Is the information up to date? When was it written?
- Who wrote the information? Did experts review the information on the site?
- Does the website avoid emotional claims? Does it avoid making unbelievable claims?

Privacy

- Does the website ask for your personal information?
- Do they tell you how they will use it? Is there a privacy policy?



Help Stop the Spread of Health Misinformation

Try these tips:

- Look at the “About Us” page on a website for information to help you answer the evaluation questions.
- Who is the person or organization writing the content? Type their name into a search engine to see what other people say about them.
- Type the health claim into a search engine to see if reliable sources share similar information.
- Learn how to make sense of medical research through the MedlinePlus guide at bit.ly/3BNbgta.

Discuss the health claim with your health care provider before relying on it.

Talk to a health care provider, like your doctor or nurse, about your health concerns. Online information is not a good substitute for medical advice.

Learn more about evaluating health information through MedlinePlus at bit.ly/3P7oZOr.

Sources: [Office of the Surgeon General](#) and [National Library of Medicine](#)

