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# Understanding Media and Internet Health Information



- **Is the information current?** Look to see the date of posting or when the site was last updated (usually located at the bottom of the web page).
- **Is a product advertised?** Be cautious of web sites that advertise products, particularly if the product's claims seem too good to be true.
- **Is there contact information?** Web sites should provide a way to contact the organization.

**Some trusted online health resources:**

- www.isms.org
- www.ama-assn.org
- www.healthfinder.gov
- www.medlineplus.gov
- www.cdc.gov
- www.fda.gov

**My doctor recommends the following web sites:**

- http://www. \_\_\_\_\_
- http://www. \_\_\_\_\_
- http://www. \_\_\_\_\_
- http://www. \_\_\_\_\_

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION OR  
TO COMMENT ON THIS BROCHURE,**

please contact the  
ISMS Division of Health Policy Research at  
[hpresearch@isms.org](mailto:hpresearch@isms.org) or 312-782-1654.

It's hard not to notice the large amount of health information presented to you every day. Through media reports, advertising and the Internet, sometimes all this information can be overwhelming and even frightening. It can be difficult to discern what information is important and relevant to your health, and what is just a marketing ploy or media hype.

This brochure was developed to help you make sense of the health information you hear every day and assist you in making good decisions for your health and well-being.



**Illinois  
State  
Medical  
Society**

**Illinois State Medical Society**  
20 N. Michigan Ave. Ste. 700  
Chicago, IL 60602  
800-782-ISMS  
[www.isms.org](http://www.isms.org)



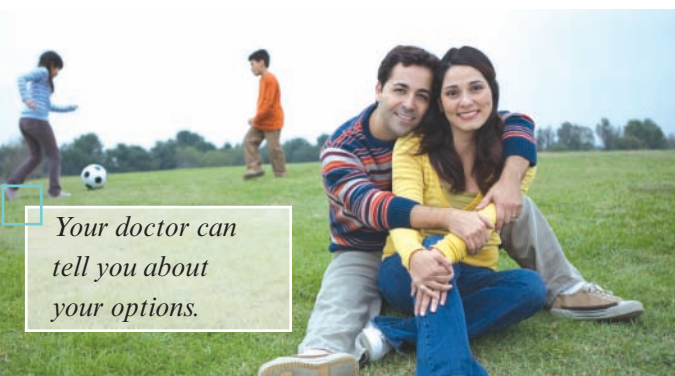
## Direct-to-consumer advertising

Prescription drug ads are everywhere: in the newspaper, on television, in magazines and on the Internet.

When viewing these ads, it is smart to be cautious. Remember:

- **Advertisers only tell you part of the story.** There may be additional information you are missing such as how effective the drug really is, and what the risks are of taking the drug.
- **All drugs have side effects.** A side effect is an undesirable effect that occurs when taking a drug. Side effects vary for each individual and can range from mild to severe. Ads don't disclose all of a drug's side effects, and sometimes don't disclose any at all.
- **The drug may not be right for you.** Your health history, current medications, allergies, and current health status all must be taken into account before starting a new medication. Only your doctor can know if a drug is right for you.
- **There may be a more appropriate alternative for you.** Depending on your health and disease status, there may be a better medical treatment for you. Your doctor can tell you about your options.

Only your doctor can determine if a drug is right for you. Bring any questions you might have to your doctor.



Your doctor can tell you about your options.



If you have any questions about your health after hearing a media story, ask your doctor.

## Media reports

New medical findings are being reported every day. But how do you know if the study is relevant to your health, or if it represents quality news reporting?

Here are some important factors to consider when the media reports new medical findings:

- **What is the source of the story?** The news report should tell you where the information is coming from. If it comes from a medical study involving medical doctors, the information may be more reliable.
- **Is the news story relevant to you?** Are the subjects of the news story similar to you in age, race, gender and stage of disease?
- **Is it making a promise too good to be true?** Be cautious of studies that use the words "cure," "miracle" or "breakthrough." Check the source of the information to ensure it's a reliable news source.

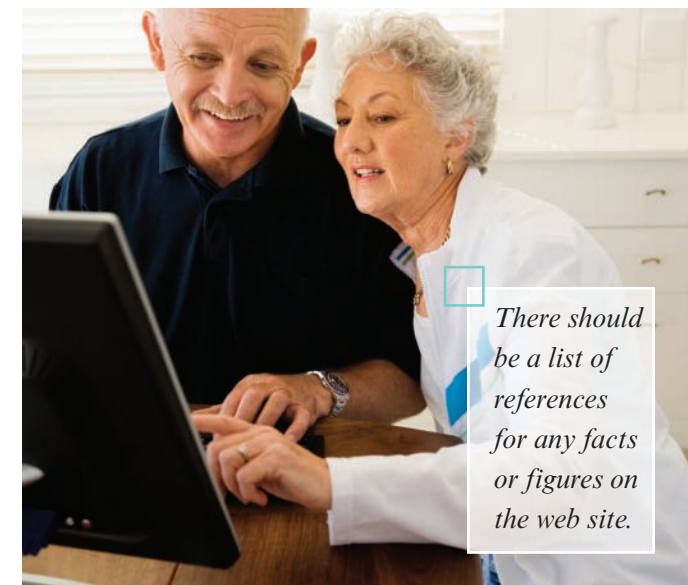
If you have any questions about your health after hearing a media story, ask your doctor. Bring the story to your doctor if you can. Your doctor can help you decide if it is relevant to your personal health.

## Internet resources

Where do you go to find information about your health? If you are like many patients, you probably turn to the Internet. So how do you know if the information you are reading is coming from a reliable source?

Here are some questions to help you identify reliable web sites:

- **Is the source of the content clearly identified?** There should be a list of references for any facts or figures on the web site.
- **Is it from a reliable source?** It is best to find an independent source of information such as:
  - Physician professional organizations.
  - Not-for-profit organizations. (sites that end in .org)
  - Universities (sites that end in .edu).
  - Government health agencies. (sites that end in .gov)



There should be a list of references for any facts or figures on the web site.

