

Protect Yourself from Health Misinformation

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

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

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 the [CDC.gov](https://www.cdc.gov) or [MedlinePlus.gov](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/) 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

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](#)

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