How do I know if information on the web is reliable?

brainstrust information sheet

Know Hows are published by *brainstrust* to help people living with a brain tumour to understand current topics. They are produced with input from relevant scientific and clinical experts and are written in a way that should help you to understand often complicated topics.

If you have an idea for a Know How, then please let us know.

If you have any queries, don't forget you can talk to one of our support specialists on **01983 292 405**, or email **hello@brainstrust.org.uk**.

Why do we need this Know How?

The internet has blessed us with a treasure trove of knowledge, easily accessible with the click of a button. But unfortunately, not all information on the web is created equal. Misinformation spreads like wildfire online, but there are some things you can have front of mind that will help you distinguish fact from fad. It's important to remember that just because a self-proclaimed health expert has a lot of followers and fans doesn't mean that the information they share online is reliable. In fact, the most outlandish stories often generate the most attention. We know too that when you are stressed:

- finding accurate, unbiased online information that is clear, reliable and not too technical can be tricky

- it's important to be able to sift information, as it is easy to become overwhelmed

- you will probably be sent lots of information by people who mean well and who want to help but don't really have the insight needed to be able to share what is relevant and meaningful for you.

So how do you know that what you are reading is reliable?

What does this mean?

There are several ways to tell if a website is reliable. Bottom line? Trust your instinct. If something is telling you it doesn't feel right, it probably isn't trustworthy.

1. Who wrote the article?

Take a look at the individual or organisation running the website. Are the articles written by people with relevant credentials or background in the topic? Is the organisation a reputable, established voice on that subject? If so, these are good signs that the website authors have done their homework.

Avoid anonymous authors. Articles or studies whose authors are named are often – though not always – more reliable than works produced anonymously – so, unnamed. It makes sense: if someone is willing to put their name on something they've written, chances are they stand by the information it contains. And if you have the name of the author, you can always Google them to check their credentials.

2. Who is the audience?

Who is engaging with the site? If reputable professionals and experts are referencing or sharing information from the site, that offers added confidence that it is a source of solid information.

3. Look for sites from established institutions

The internet is full of websites that were started five minutes ago. What you want are sites associated with trusted institutions that have been around for a while and have a track record of reliability and integrity. These could include those run by government agencies, charities, foundations, or colleges and universities. For example, these domains/URLs are reliable:

.ac.uk – a UK university

.edu – an American university

.gov.uk or scotland.gov.uk – the UK or Scottish government

.nhs.uk or scot.nhs.uk – the NHS or the NHS in Scotland

.org.uk or .org – these tend to be charities

4. Steer clear of commercial sites

Sites run by companies and businesses – their websites usually end in .com or .co.uk – are more often than not trying to sell you something. And if they're trying to sell you something, chances are whatever information they're presenting will be tilted in favour of their product. That's not to say corporate sites should be excluded entirely. But be wary. There is snake oil out there, and when you are living with a serious illness, you are vulnerable. If you are not sure, ask someone close to you or ask *brainstrust*.

5. Check the date

How current is the website? When was the last time the site was updated? Are new articles or topics added regularly? If the website has not been updated in a long time, you might not be getting the most up-to-date information

on that subject. If a website seems old, it's probably best to steer clear. One way to check: look for a 'last updated' date on the page or site.

6. How does the site look?

If a site looks poorly designed and amateurish, chances are it was created by amateurs. Steer clear. But be careful – just because a website looks professionally designed doesn't mean it's reliable. Also look for accuracy. A good site should be free of spelling errors and typos.

7. Check the links

Reputable websites often link to each other. You can find out which other websites link to the site you're researching by conducting a link-specific Google search. In the Google search field, type in 'link:' followed by the address (URL) of the site you're researching. For example:

link:https://brainstrust.org.uk

The search results will show you which websites link to the one you're researching. If lots of sites are linking to your site, and those sites seem reputable, then that's a good sign.

8. Ask questions

If something doesn't quite feel right, it probably isn't. If you're not sure how something adds up, or if something posted seems too good to be true, leave a comment or email the author or website administrator to learn more or to ask about their sources. Your comments can help make others think twice! Also, keep in mind that someone selling a product online might have a biased opinion on how useful a particular product (or diet) might be. Reputable bloggers and writers will always disclose relationships and/or sponsorships with companies or products they mention.

Ask yourself

- How up to date is the site?

- Who wrote it?

- Is it trying to sell me something?

- How does the site look and feel?

- Is it from a trustworthy source?

- Is it biased? Or objective?

- Who can I ask to check its authority?

Contact

Talk to *brainstrust*. We can help. You can call, write, type, text. Email for help and support: **hello@brainstrust.org.uk**.
Telephone: **01983 292 405**.

Sources:

Rogers, Tony. '8 Ways to Determine Website Reliability.' ThoughtCo, published 2019 [Accessed April 2022], https://www.thoughtco.com/gauging-website-reliability-2073838.

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