Paging Dr. Google

About eight million Americans search the Internet daily for health information, according to a survey from the Pew Internet & American Life Project, but only 15 percent of Internet surfers remember to check the source and date of the content they find. “Most doctors are happy to have a patient bring them new study results, but the material needs to be trustworthy and up to date,” says Peter Salgo, M.D., associate director of surgical intensive care at New York-Presbyterian Hospital. Here, how to tell what’s legit.

1. **QUESTION THE SOURCE.** Read the “about us” or “contact information” section to see where the site’s authors are getting their information. “It’s also important to know who’s funding the site. If it’s a group that stands to benefit financially, such as a drug company, look at what’s presented critically,” says Celia Boyer, executive director of the Health on the Net (HON) Foundation, an independent nonprofit organization that promotes quality health care.

2. **LOOK FOR A SEAL OF APPROVAL.** The Health on the Net Foundation’s HONcode and a certificate from URAC, a nonprofit organization that evaluates health care, are signs that a Web site has been vetted to meet basic criteria for ethics and accuracy. Visit healthonnet.org or urac.org to find approved sites.

3. **GO FOR GOLD-STANDARD RESEARCH.** Footnotes and links to sites ending in .gov or .edu that give you access to university- or government-sponsored studies ensure that you’re getting tested information, says Dr. Salgo. Study results from journals such as the New England Journal of Medicine are also trustworthy.

4. **BEWARE OF SITES MAKING CLAIMS THAT SOUND TOO GOOD TO BE TRUE.** Red flags include the phrase “despite what most doctors think.” If you have questions, ask your doctor for suggestions of other places to get information.

—Jacqui Detwiler