



# Patient Information And The Internet

Many people these days are taking the initiative to learn more about health care for themselves and their family members. If you are doing so, we commend you and offer this handout to support your efforts.

Some books, articles, and online information services are reliable, but many are not. You need to distinguish what is factual from what is someone's opinion. It's important to be aware that many of the online health services were created by companies whose main goal is to make money. Don't be duped by something that is simply an advertisement, even if it doesn't look like the ads on TV. Chat rooms, where non-medical people are giving opinions, can also have a very impressive appearance.

The next time you log on to your favorite health care website, look for the sponsor and the advertisers. Then consider whether the information is in your best interest, or whether it's designed to sell you something. It is important to use health care information that is reviewed by competent medical professionals. We suggest you use the following 5 criteria to evaluate the sites you visit. Consider any online information unreliable unless you can answer these questions:

## **1. Who wrote what you're reading?**

The site should contain the name of a real person.

## **2. Where does that person work?**

A university? A Web business? A product manufacturer? Can you easily find that information on the site?

## **3. Was the information created for the site?**

If not, is there clear attribution showing where the information originated?

## **4. Who owns the site, and who paid for it?**

The source of money and ownership should be clearly identified.

## **5. Can you tell when the article was posted, whether it has been updated and when?**

If you can't answer these questions, you may want to look elsewhere for health information. Even if you can answer these questions easily, there's still no guarantee that the information is accurate and unbiased. Remember, there is no regulating agency for material posted on the Web! If you have questions about anything you find on the Internet pertaining to women's health issues, your doctor will be happy to discuss them with you.

Since so much information is available today, your doctor may not know any more than you on any given subject the first time you raise it. However, we will make a commitment to you to use our resources to get you the responsible answers you need in a timely fashion.

Please ask your provider about several excellent websites that our practice DOES recommend visiting. And here's to happy (and responsible) surfing on the net!