



## How to Find Reliable ENT Info

The Internet is a powerful tool and an excellent source for all types of information. Many Internet sites contain information about medical conditions and health care.

A good site can provide additional and valuable information about your condition, and enhance understanding of your diagnosis or treatment. By learning more about your condition, you can spend more time with your physician discussing details of your care and more effectively participate in the medical decision-making process.

While the Internet is very useful for finding healthcare information, it is important to be aware of its limitations and potential risks. Here are some facts to consider:

- Producing professional-appearing information on the Internet is relatively inexpensive, so it is important to separate the quality of the information from how nicely it is presented.
- Information on the Internet may be inaccurate, incomplete, or lack the details that are relevant to your situation.
- Locating high-quality information about your condition may be difficult. Most search engines and directories do not rank information from your searches based upon the quality. Sites listed at the top of your search results may be present for a variety of reasons, e.g., a company that wants you to buy its product paid the search engine company to list it near the top.
- Your privacy could potentially be violated and your employer, your Internet Service Provider, a website, or others could learn that you have a medical condition based upon sites you view on the Internet.
- Breakthroughs in medicine typically require years of basic science and clinical research prior to becoming reality. Unbelievable promises of new treatments and other claims that seem "too good to be true" usually are. The Internet provides an easy medium on which to market "miracle cures."
- Sites which offer medical diagnoses based on symptoms (without a medical history, medical examination, or tests) do not follow responsible medical practices recommended by the major medical organizations in this country.
- The practice of medicine can be very technical, and requires years of study in medical school and residency prior to its practice. A visit to the Internet is not a replacement for this training.

## ***How Do I Know if Medical Information on the Internet Is Accurate and Reliable?***

Determining whether health information on the Internet is accurate and reliable can be difficult, even for practicing physicians. Professional-appearing sites may contain inaccurate information, or may be biased towards commercial interests that support the site. Meanwhile, sites that do not appear professional may potentially contain accurate information.

There are several keys to finding and using accurate healthcare information on the Internet:

- Discuss information that you find on the Internet with your physician, who can help you better understand the information and help determine if it is accurate. Bring hard copies with you to your visit if you have a specific question about a site or information contained on it.
- Look for information on sites from credible sources, including your physician's site, medical societies, government agencies, and university health centers.
- A site that is linked to a credible site could potentially have inaccurate information, as the organization that maintains a site cannot control information on sites to which they link, and these sites are subject to change.
- Ask your physician to recommend sites for your condition.
- Read all health information critically, and be aware that potential inaccuracies may exist.

## ***What Are Some Credible Sources of Otolaryngology (ear, nose, & throat) Information on the Internet?***

There are many websites that contain educational materials about otolaryngology disorders. Here are some very credible (and free) health information sites:

**The American Academy of Otolaryngology—Head and Neck Surgery** is the largest organization that represents ear, nose, and throat specialists, and its website has many resources, including a section on patient education.

**The National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders** is the division of the National Institutes of Health (NIH), that is "mandated to conduct and support biomedical and behavioral research and research training in the normal and disordered processes of hearing, balance, smell, taste, voice, speech, and language." The site has information about specific health topics, clinical trials, and research news.

**CancerNet** is a service of the National Cancer Institute, a division of the NIH. This site has information about all types of cancer (including cancer of the head and neck), testing, treatment, clinical trials, and research. There are also resources for coping with cancer and for support of cancer patients.



Empowering otolaryngologist—head and neck surgeons to deliver the best patient care

1650 Diagonal Road, Alexandria, Virginia 22314-2857 U.S.A. 1-703-836-4444 1-703-683-5100 fax www.entnet.org

**MEDLINEplus** is a service from the National Library of Medicine. The site includes links to other credible health sites selected by the National Library of Medicine. The site also allows you to search MEDLINE, the largest and most accurate database of the scientific medical literature. Additionally, the site has a guide to more than 9,000 prescription and over-the-counter medications.

### ***How Can I Protect My Privacy Online when Looking at Health Information?***

As an Internet user, you should be concerned about your privacy, and how your personal information is handled online. It is very important to keep current with the latest issues related to electronic privacy. Here are a several things you should do:

- Become familiar with your employer's policies regarding Internet usage while at work. Technology exists that allows your employer to monitor what Internet sites you visit and to read your e-mail. This is within their legal rights in most cases.
- Review privacy policies of websites you visit before submitting any information you wish to keep private.
- When registering for a commercial healthcare website, realize that every page that you visit on the site can be linked with your personal information (name, e-mail address, etc). This "profile" could potentially be revealed to third parties.
- Be wary of free questionnaires and health calculators, as this information can easily be combined with a user profile that you submit to a site.
- Keep your passwords protected, and do not share your accounts with family or friends.
- Learn how to clear your cache and erase "cookies" from your system.
- Consider using a firewall for your network connection, encryption for your e-mail, multiple aliases when filling out user profile forms, and tools that allow you to navigate the World Wide Web anonymously.

### ***How Can I Access My Otolaryngologist's Website?***

If a member of the AAO-HNS maintains a practice website, it is listed with his or her address and fax number through the easy-to-use "Find an Otolaryngologist" search engine [add url here?]. Patients can search for physicians in their area using a variety of search options.[but give some examples?]



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