

Tips For Evaluating Information On The Internet

The Internet touches every aspect of our lives, whether we use it to keep in touch with friends and family, research a question, shop for a gift or just read the news. But with all of the available information, how do we know what is trustworthy? To help evaluate and recognize Web sites that are providing credible information, consider the following tips:

- ✓ Is it clear who is responsible for the contents of the page?
- ✓ Is there a link to a page describing the purpose of the sponsoring organization?
- ✓ Is there a way of verifying the legitimacy of the page's sponsor such as a telephone number or postal address to contact for more information?
- ✓ Are informational sources clearly available for verification by another source?
- ✓ Is it clear who wrote the material and are the author's qualifications clearly stated?
- ✓ Is the information presented as an opinion and clearly stated as such? Is the source a qualified professional or organization?
- ✓ Can you easily determine when the site was last updated to determine if the information is current?
- ✓ Does the information contain several grammatical, spelling and typographical errors? Such errors indicate a lack of quality control and can actually produce inaccuracies in information.
- ✓ Does the site have a privacy policy? If not, the site should not ask for personal information.
- ✓ If a copyright protects the material, who holds it?

If the Web site or the information contained within the Web site is not consistent with these guidelines, make sure you check another source to ensure you are getting the most accurate information available.

Tips To Evaluate Oral Health Care Information

The sheer volume of health information available through the media or the Internet can be overwhelming. Identifying reliable and credible health information can be a challenge. To assist you, the ADA has developed the following tips to help you evaluate the quality of information about oral health care topics.

QUALIFICATIONS

Examine the source of the information to determine if the individuals or organizations are qualified to speak about the topic and can be considered credible. The types of questions you should ask include:

- What are the qualifications of the person or organization?
- Is this person a practicing dentist or does this organization work with dentists?
- What type of scientific or health care expertise do they have?
- Does this person have a dental or medical degree?
- Did the information come from an objective source, such as the Food and Drug Administration, a medical or academic institution, or a well-known scientific or medical publication?

MOTIVATIONS

Always question the motivations of the information source. The types of questions you should ask include:

- Why is this person or organization speaking about this topic?
- Is the source an individual or group promoting a particular cause or point of view?
- Is this person or organization trying to raise money?
- Does this person or organization want my personal information, or are they asking me to do something on their behalf?
- Is the information provided in the public interest?
- Is any advertising on the page clearly separate from the health information?

SCIENCE

Always question scientific results and determine if the facts support the conclusions. Ask yourself if the findings sound too good or too awful to be true. Don't hesitate to get a second opinion or ask additional questions to be sure that you are getting accurate information. Also, remember that just because it is posted on the Internet does not necessarily mean the information is true or credible. Finally, be careful about any individual or organization that pushes you toward immediate action without consulting a dentist or other oral health care professional first. The types of questions you should ask include:

Information on the Internet . . .

Page 3

- Do the author's credentials reflect expertise in the area?
- Is the argument or conclusion supported by sound scientific evidence or just an unsubstantiated theory? Is it a myth or fact?
- Do objective organizations such as the World Health Organization, the Food and Drug Administration and the National Institutes of Health support these claims or conclusions?
- Are the study results current, and does the research provide the most up-to-date facts available?
- Has the information appeared in a well-known medical, dental or science journal and been reviewed by other dentists or members of the scientific community? If so, the publication should be easily obtainable through a medical/dental library.
- Does any other credible health care organization support the findings?

These tips will help you sort through the maze of health information to find credible information you can use to make informed decisions about your oral health care. If you have questions about your oral health, talk to your dentist. Your dentist is a trusted, credible source of oral health information.

Key resources for oral health care information and additional information about amalgam:

- The American Dental Association
<http://www.ada.org/public/topics/fillings.html>
- The Food and Drug Administration
<http://www.fda.gov/cdrh/consumer/amalgams.html>
- World Health Organization
<http://www.who.int/pcs/newsletter/ipcs-01.pdf>
- National Institutes of Health
<http://cerhr.niehs.nih.gov/genpub/topics/mercury2-ccae.html> - Mercury in Dental Amalgams (Fillings)
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
<http://www.cdc.gov/OralHealth/factsheets/amalgam.htm>
- United States Department of Health and Human Services
<http://www.healthfinder.gov>