



## Grade 7 Sample Lesson Plan: Evaluating Fraudulent Health Claims

### SOLs

- Identify consumer protections for health products and services.
- Evaluate the accuracy of claims about dietary supplements and popular diets
- Promote the importance of regular health and medical screenings and medical examinations.
- Evaluate the validity of information from different resources, and share findings with others.
- Identify a health care product or service for students, families, schools, or communities.
- Demonstrate how to influence others to make positive health choices.

### Objectives/Goals

- Students will research and evaluate claims about health products and services. Students will create a persuasive ad for a positive health choice.

### Materials

- Access to computers, printers, paper
- Pre-identified lists of “questionable” and “positive” health products and services

### Procedure

*Share reference information with students.*

#### Activity #1

- Have students identify one questionable health product or service to research on the internet. For their research, they must visit at least one site with web addresses ending in
  - .gov, .edu and .org, and three sites with web addresses ending in .com sites.
- The students should create a poster or presentation that (1) includes a cited excerpt of the page’s information; (2) summarize what they found on each site; and (3) includes responses to the following questions (*source: Kids Health Media Literacy Teacher’s Guide*):

- Website name and URL:
  - Publisher or organization that operates the site:
  - Is it reviewed by a doctor or medical expert?
  - Is the site current? When was it last updated?
  - Is there advertising on the site? If yes, how might this influence the information on the site?
  - Is the information on the website documented?
  - Are the links relevant and functioning?
- Activity #2
  - Help students select one positive health product or service.
  - The students should engage in internet research to document credible evidence that the product/service is recommended:
    - Website name and URL:
    - Publisher or organization that operates the site:
    - Is it reviewed by a doctor or medical expert?
    - Is the site current? When was it last updated?
    - Is there advertising on the site? If yes, how might this influence the information on the site?
    - Is the information on the website documented?
    - Are the links relevant and functioning?
  - The student should then use at least one advertising technique to develop a one page ad to influence others to make positive health choices and share their ad with the class.

### Assessment Idea

- Evaluate student participation and response to activity assignments.

### References

- Family Doctor.Org (American Association of Family Physicians) – Finding Reliable Health Information on the Web <https://familydoctor.org/health-information-on-the-web-finding-reliable-information/?adfree=true>
- Food and Drug Administration - FDA – How to Spot Health Fraud <http://www.fda.gov/Drugs/EmergencyPreparedness/BioterrorismandDrugPreparedness/ucm137284.htm>
- Federal Trade Commission – FTC – Truth in Advertising: Health and Fitness Claims <https://www.ftc.gov/news-events/media-resources/truth-advertising/health-claims>
- Iowa Children’s Hospital – Online Health Information What Can You Trust <https://uichildrens.org/online-health-information-what-can-you-trust>
- Kids Health Grade 6-8 Media Literacy and Health Teacher’s Guide [https://classroom.kidshealth.org/classroom/6to8/personal/growing/media\\_literacy\\_health.pdf](https://classroom.kidshealth.org/classroom/6to8/personal/growing/media_literacy_health.pdf)
- Medline Plus - Evaluating Health Information <https://medlineplus.gov/evaluatinghealthinformation.html>
- Medline Plus - Guide to Healthy Web Surfing

- <https://medlineplus.gov/healthywebsurfing.html>
- Media Literacy -Recognizing Propaganda:  
<http://www.glencoe.com/sec/health/teachres/lessonplans/mlshampoo.shtml>
- NIH Office of Dietary Supplements  
<https://ods.od.nih.gov/HealthInformation/consumerprotection.sec.aspx>
- Read Write Think – Analyzing Ads Persuasive Techniques  
[http://www.readwritethink.org/files/resources/lesson\\_images/lesson1166/AnalyzingAds.pdf](http://www.readwritethink.org/files/resources/lesson_images/lesson1166/AnalyzingAds.pdf)

# Health Information on the Web: Finding Reliable Information

## Health Information on the Web: Finding Reliable Information

“Don’t believe everything you read.” It’s an old warning that is especially true for health-related information you find on the World Wide Web.

The Web can be a great resource when you want to learn about a specific disease or health condition. You can also find tips on staying healthy. But among the millions of websites that offer health-related information, there are many that present myths and half-truths as if they are facts.

To avoid unreliable health information when you’re surfing the Web, ask yourself the following questions:

### Where did this information come from?

Any website that provides health-related information should tell you the information’s source. See if you can find answers to the following questions:

- Who wrote this information? Keep in mind that many health-related websites post information that comes from other sources. If the person or organization that runs the website didn’t write the information, the original source should be clearly stated.
- If a health care professional didn’t write the information, was it reviewed by a doctor or another medical expert?
- If the information contains any statistics, do the numbers come from a reliable source?
- Does something on the website appear to be someone’s opinion rather than a fact? If so, is the opinion from a qualified person or organization (such as a doctor or medical organization)?

### How current is this information?

Health information is constantly changing. For example, researchers continue to learn new things about various diseases and their treatments. You should know whether the health-related information you’re reading is up-to-date. Many Web pages will post the date on which the page was last reviewed or updated. You can usually find this date at the very bottom of the page. If this date isn’t included, check to see whether the page has a copyright line. This tells you when the information was originally written. If the page you’re reading hasn’t been reviewed in the past year, look for more recently updated information.

### Who is responsible for the content of the website?

Before you believe any health-related information you find on the Web, find out who is responsible for information on the site. The easiest way to do this is to look at the site’s home page. If the home page doesn’t tell you who publishes the site, look for a link that says “About us” or “About this site.” Often, this link will be at the bottom of the home page. Clicking on this link will usually take you to a page that explains what person or organization is responsible for the information on the site.

**Websites published by an organization.** Health-related websites may be published by the U.S. government (.gov), a nonprofit organization (.org) or a college or university (.edu). These sites may be the most reliable sources of health information because they’re usually not supported by for-profit companies, such as drug or insurance companies. However, you still need to find out where these sites get their information.

Sites with .com Web addresses may represent a specific company or be published by a company that uses the Web to sell products or services. These are called commercial sites. Commercial sites can offer useful and accurate information. You may want to be more careful about believing the information you read on these sites, though. The information may not be fair and accurate if the company that pays for the site has something to gain from it. It's a good idea to double-check information you read on commercial websites.

**Websites published by an individual.** Websites published by individuals may offer support and advice about coping with certain conditions and their treatments. These sites can contain reliable and useful information. However, it's very important to double-check health information you see on a website published by an individual. While many of these sites contain good information, some may contain myths or rumors.

## Other Organizations

### Remember:

Information that you find on a website does not replace your doctor's advice. Your doctor is the best person to answer questions about your personal health. If you read something on the Web that doesn't agree with what your doctor has told you, ask him or her about it.

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*This article was contributed by: familydoctor.org editorial staff*

**Tags:** **Internet** (<https://familydoctor.org/tag/internet/>), **patient education** (<https://familydoctor.org/tag/patient-education/>), **patient information** (<https://familydoctor.org/tag/patient-information/>), **search** (<https://familydoctor.org/tag/search/>), **Web site** (<https://familydoctor.org/tag/web-site/>), **World Wide Web** (<https://familydoctor.org/tag/world-wide-web/>)



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*This information provides a general overview and may not apply to everyone. Talk to your family doctor to find out if this information applies to you and to get more information on this subject.*

# How to Spot Health Fraud

by Paula Kurtzweil

You don't have to look far to find a health product that's totally bogus--or a consumer who's totally unsuspecting. Promotions for fraudulent products show up daily in newspaper and magazine ads and TV "infomercials." They accompany products sold in stores, on the Internet, and through mail-order catalogs. They're passed along by word-of-mouth.

And consumers respond, spending billions of dollars a year on fraudulent health products, according to Stephen Barrett, M.D., head of Quackwatch Inc., a nonprofit corporation that combats health fraud. Hoping to find a cure for what ails them, improve their well-being, or just look better, consumers often fall victim to products and devices that do nothing more than cheat them out of their money, steer them away from useful, proven treatments, and possibly do more bodily harm than good.

"There's a lot of money to be made," says Bob Gatling, director of the program operations staff in the Food and Drug Administration's Center for Devices and Radiological Health. "People want to believe there's something that can cure them."

FDA describes health fraud as "articles of unproven effectiveness that are promoted to improve health, well being or appearance." The articles can be drugs, devices, foods, or cosmetics for human or animal use.

FDA shares federal oversight of health fraud products with the Federal Trade Commission. FDA regulates safety, manufacturing and product labeling, including claims in labeling, such as package inserts and accompanying literature. FTC regulates advertising of these products.

Because of limited resources, says Joel Aronson, team leader for the nontraditional drug compliance team in FDA's Center for Drug Evaluation and Research, the agency's regulation of health fraud products is based on a priority system that depends on whether a fraudulent product poses a direct or indirect risk.

When the use of a fraudulent product results in injuries or adverse reactions, it's a direct risk. When the product itself does not cause harm but its use may keep someone away from proven, sometimes essential, medical treatment, the risk is indirect. For example, a fraudulent product touted as a cure for diabetes might lead someone to delay or discontinue insulin injections or other proven treatments.

While FDA remains vigilant against health fraud, many fraudulent products may escape regulatory scrutiny, maintaining their hold in the marketplace for some time to lure increasing numbers of consumers into their web of deceit.

How can you avoid being scammed by a worthless product? Though health fraud marketers have become more sophisticated about selling their products, Aronson says, these charlatans often use the same old phrases and gimmicks to gain consumers' attention--and trust. You can protect yourself by learning some of their techniques.

The following products typify three fraudulent products whose claims prompted FDA to issue warning letters to the products' marketers, notifying them that their products violated federal law. Two of the products also were added to FDA's import alert list of unapproved new drugs promoted in the United States. Products under import alert are barred from entry onto the U.S. market.

Take a look at these products' promotions. They are rife with the kind of red flags to look out for when deciding whether to try a health product unknown to you.

Paula Kurtzweil is a member of FDA's public affairs staff.

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# Tip-Offs to Rip-Offs

## Product No. 1: Pure emu oil

FDA determined that a pure emu oil product marketed to treat or cure a wide range of diseases was an unapproved drug. Its marketer had never submitted to FDA data to support the product's safe and effective use.

### One Product Does It All

**" ... extremely beneficial in the treatment of rheumatism, arthritis ... infections ... prostate problems, ulcers ... cancer, heart trouble, hardening of the arteries, diabetes and more. ... "**

**"completely eliminating the gangrene ...**

**"... antibiotic, pain reliever ... ."**

Be suspicious of products that claim to cure a wide range of unrelated diseases--particularly serious diseases, such as cancer and diabetes. No product can treat every disease and condition, and for many serious diseases, there are no cures, only therapies to help manage them.

Cancer, AIDS, diabetes, and other serious diseases are big draws because people with these diseases are often desperate for a cure and willing to try just about anything.

### Personal Testimonials

**"Alzheimer's Disease!!! My husband has Alzheimer. On September 2, 1998 he began eating 1 teaspoon full of ... Pure Emu Oil each day. ... Now (in just 22 days) he mowed the grass, cleaned out the garage, weeded the flower beds, and we take our morning walk again. It hasn't helped his memory much yet, but he is more like himself again!!!"**

Personal testimonies can tip you off to health fraud because they are difficult to prove. Often, says Reynaldo Rodriguez, a compliance officer and health fraud coordinator for FDA's Dallas district office, testimonials are personal case histories that have been passed on from person to person. Or, the testimony can be completely made up.

"This is the weakest form of scientific validity," Rodriguez says. "It's just compounded hearsay."

Some patients' favorable experiences with a fraudulent product may be due more to a remission in their disease or from earlier or concurrent use of approved medical treatments, rather than use of the fraudulent product itself.

### Quick Fixes

**"... eliminates skin cancer in days! ..."**

Be wary of talk that suggests a product can bring quick relief or provide a quick cure, especially if the disease or condition is serious. Even with proven treatments, few diseases can be treated quickly. Note also that the words "in days" can really refer to any length of time. Fraud promoters like to use ambiguous language like this to make it easier to finagle their way out of any legal action that may result.

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## Product No. 2: Over-the-counter transdermal weight-loss patch

FDA issued a warning letter to the marketer of the weight-loss product described here because it did not have an approved new drug application. Because of the newness of the dosage form--skin-delivery systems--FDA requires evidence of effectiveness, in the form of a new drug application, before the product can be marketed legally.

### 'Natural'

**"Healthy, simple and natural-way to help you lose and control your weight."**

Don't be fooled by the term "natural." It's often used in health fraud as an attention-grabber; it suggests a product is safer than conventional treatments. But the term doesn't necessarily equate to safety because some plants--for example, poisonous mushrooms--can kill when ingested. And among legitimate drug products, says Shelly Maifarth, a compliance officer and health fraud coordinator for FDA's Denver district office, 60 percent of over-the-counter drugs and 25 percent of prescription drugs are based on natural ingredients.

And, any product--synthetic or natural--potent enough to work like a drug is going to be potent enough to cause side effects.

### Time-Tested or New-Found Treatment

**"This revolutionary innovation is formulated by using proven principles of natural health based upon 200 years of medical science."**

Usually it's one or the other, but this claim manages to suggest it's both a breakthrough and a decades-old remedy.

Claims of an "innovation," "miracle cure," "exclusive product," or "new discovery" or "magical" are highly suspect. If a product was a cure for a serious disease, it would be widely reported in the media and regularly prescribed by health professionals--not hidden in an obscure magazine or newspaper ad, late-night television show, or Website promotion, where the marketers are of unknown, questionable or nonscientific backgrounds.

The same applies to products purported to be "ancient remedies" or based on "folklore" or "tradition." These claims suggest that these products' longevity proves they are safe and effective. But some herbs reportedly used in ancient times for medicinal purposes carry risks identified only recently.

### Satisfaction Guaranteed

**"... Guarantee: If after 30 days ... you have not lost at least 4 pounds each week, ... your uncashed check will be returned to you ... ."**

Here's another red flag: money-back guarantees, no questions asked.

Good luck getting your money back. Marketers of fraudulent products rarely stay in the same place for long. Because customers won't be able to find them, the marketers can afford to be generous with their guarantees.

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## Product No. 3: Unapproved weight-loss product marketed as an alternative to a prescription drug combination



FDA issued an import alert for a Canadian-made weight-loss product whose claims compared the product with two prescription weight-loss drugs taken off the market after FDA determined they posed a health hazard.

## Promises of Easy Weight Loss

**"Finally, rapid weight loss without dieting!"**

For most people, there is only one way to lose weight: Eat less food (or fewer high-calorie foods) and increase activity.

Note the ambiguity of the term "rapid." A reasonable and healthy weight loss is about 1 to 2 pounds a week.

## Paranoid Accusations

**"Drug companies make it nearly impossible for doctors to resist prescribing their expensive pills for what ails you ... ."**

**"It seems these billion dollar drug giants all have one relentless competitor in common they all constantly fear--natural remedies."**

These claims suggest that health-care providers and legitimate manufacturers are in cahoots with each other, promoting only the drug companies' and medical device manufacturers' products for financial gain. The claims also suggest that the medical profession and legitimate drug and device makers strive to suppress unorthodox products because they threaten their financial standing.

"This [accusation] is an easy way to get consumers' attention," says Marjorie Powell, assistant general counsel for the Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America. "But I would ask the marketers of such claims, 'Where's the evidence?' It would seem to me that in this country, outside of a regulatory agency it would be difficult to stop someone from making a claim."

Think about this, too: Would the vast number of people in the health-care field block treatments that could help millions of sick, suffering patients, many of whom could be family and friends? "It flies in the face of logic," Barrett says on his Quackwatch Website.

## Meaningless Medical Jargon

**"... Hunger Stimulation Point (HSP) ..."**

**"... thermogenesis, which converts stored fats into soluble lipids ..."**

**"One of the many natural ingredients is inositol hexanicontinate."**

Terms and scientific explanations such as these may sound impressive and may have an element of truth to them, but the public "has no way of discerning fact from fiction," Aronson says. Fanciful terms, he says, generally cover up a lack of scientific proof.

Sometimes, the terms or explanations are lifted from a study published in a reputable scientific journal, even though the study was on another subject altogether, says Martin Katz, a compliance officer and health fraud coordinator for FDA's Florida district office. And chances are, few people will check the original published study.

"Most people who are taken in by health fraud will grasp at anything," he says. "They're not going to do the research. They're looking for a miracle."

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# Truth or Dare

The underlying rule when deciding whether a product is authentic or not is to ask yourself: "Does it sound too good to be true?" If it does, it probably isn't true.

If you're still not sure, check it out: "Look into it--before you put it in your body or on your skin," says Reynaldo Rodriguez, a compliance officer and health fraud coordinator for FDA's Dallas district office.

To check a product out, FDA health fraud coordinators suggest:

- Talk to a doctor or another health professional. "If it's an unproven or little-known treatment, always get a second opinion from a medical specialist," Rodriguez says.
- Talk to family members and friends. Legitimate medical practitioners should not discourage you from discussing medical treatments with others. Be wary of treatments offered by people who tell you to avoid talking to others because "it's a secret treatment or cure."
- Check with the Better Business Bureau or local attorneys generals' offices to see whether other consumers have lodged complaints about the product or the product's marketer.
- Check with the appropriate health professional group--for example, the American Heart Association, American Diabetes Association, or the National Arthritis Foundation if the products are promoted for heart disease, diabetes or arthritis. Many of these groups have local chapters that can provide you with various resource materials about your disease.
- Contact the FDA office closest to you. Look for the number and address in the blue pages of the phone book under U.S. Government, Health and Human Services, or go to <http://www.fda.gov/AboutFDA/ContactFDA/FindanOfficeorStaffMember/FDAPublicAffairsSpecialists/default.htm> (<http://www.fda.gov/AboutFDA/ContactFDA/FindanOfficeorStaffMember/FDAPublicAffairsSpecialists/default.htm>) on the FDA Website. FDA can tell you whether the agency has taken action against the product or its marketer. Your call also may alert FDA to a potentially illegal product and prevent others from falling victim to health fraud.

--P.K.

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## Joining Forces to Fight Fraud

Health fraud isn't confined to the United States only. It's worldwide, and to help combat it in North America, the United States has joined with Canada and Mexico to share knowledge and coordinate enforcement activities related to fraudulent health products, services and devices.

In announcing their decision in December 1998 to adopt the Joint Strategies Agreement, the countries agreed to:

- share information on current trends in health fraud
- cooperate in detecting health fraud along borders
- share information about significant investigations in their country
- consider each others' requests to investigate domestic activities and coordinate related enforcement activities
- develop and distribute joint consumer and business education messages about health fraud.

--P.K.





[KidsHealth.org/classroom](http://KidsHealth.org/classroom)

## Teacher's Guide

This guide includes:

- Standards
- Related Links
- Discussion Questions
- Activities for Students
- Reproducible Materials

## Standards

This guide correlates with the following National Health Education Standards:

Students will:

- Comprehend concepts related to health promotion and disease prevention to enhance health.
- Analyze the influence of family, peers, culture, media, technology, and other factors on health behaviors.
- Demonstrate the ability to access valid information and products and services to enhance health.
- Demonstrate the ability to use interpersonal communication skills to enhance health and avoid or reduce health risks.
- Demonstrate the ability to use decision-making skills to enhance health.
- Demonstrate the ability to practice health-enhancing behaviors and avoid or reduce health risks.

National Health Education Standards: <http://www.cdc.gov/healthyschools/sher/standards/index.htm>

Technology has made it so easy for people to get health-related information. But not all of the information is accurate. The following discussion questions and activities will help your students learn to evaluate health-related information so they can make healthy choices in their lives.

## Related KidsHealth Links

### Articles for Kids:

#### What Kids Say About Their Health

[KidsHealth.org/en/kids/poll-health-literacy.html](http://KidsHealth.org/en/kids/poll-health-literacy.html)

#### Safe Cyberspace Surfing

[KidsHealth.org/en/kids/internet-safety.html](http://KidsHealth.org/en/kids/internet-safety.html)

#### Going to the Doctor

[KidsHealth.org/en/kids/going-to-dr.html](http://KidsHealth.org/en/kids/going-to-dr.html)

### Articles for Teens:

#### Figuring Out Health News

[TeensHealth.org/en/teens/health-news.html](http://TeensHealth.org/en/teens/health-news.html)

#### Talking to Your Doctor

[TeensHealth.org/en/teens/talk-doctor.html](http://TeensHealth.org/en/teens/talk-doctor.html)

#### Questions to Ask Your Doctor

[TeensHealth.org/en/teens/questions-doctor.html](http://TeensHealth.org/en/teens/questions-doctor.html)

#### Online Safety

[TeensHealth.org/en/teens/internet-safety.html](http://TeensHealth.org/en/teens/internet-safety.html)

## Discussion Questions

*Note: The following questions are written in language appropriate for sharing with your students.*

1. When you want to get information about your health, where do you go? What are the best sources of factual information about health-related issues? What makes a source reliable or unreliable?
2. What influences the choices you make about your health – the way you eat, exercise, and how you take care of yourself? Make a list of those influences and rate how much they affect you.
3. How does advertising online, on TV and in magazines and newspapers, etc., affect the health choices you make in life? (Think about food, medicine, fitness, health care products, etc.) How do advertisements try to get you to eat a certain food or to live a certain way?



## Activities for Students

*Note: The following activities are written in language appropriate for sharing with your students.*

### Exploring the Surf

#### Objectives:

Students will:

- Learn to evaluate Internet sites
- Analyze a variety of health-related websites for credibility

#### Materials:

- "Exploring the Surf" handout
- Computer with Internet access
- Pencil or pen

#### Class Time:

2 hours

#### Activity:

Information about your health is everywhere you turn – online, on TV, in magazines and newspapers, on billboards and in school. Many people turn to the Internet for answers to health-related questions. Unfortunately, not all information on the Internet is accurate. So how do you determine which websites are reliable and trustworthy? Read the KidsHealth.org articles to gain a better understanding about reliable information and credible sources. Next, use the "Exploring the Surf" handout to analyze four health-related websites. After you've evaluated the websites, write about your findings. What surprised you about the websites you examined? Will your findings affect how you use the Internet to look for information in the future?

#### Extensions:

1. Your health and PE teacher, the school nurse, the school counselor, and your doctor are reliable sources of health-related information, but you might feel embarrassed to talk to them about certain topics. With a partner, role-play a conversation you might have with one of these reliable sources about an issue that concerns you.
2. Find an article in a newspaper or magazine that addresses a health-related issue. Based on what you've read at KidsHealth, do you think the article is reliable? Write a brief paragraph explaining your opinion.

## Reproducible Materials

#### Handout: Exploring the Surf

[KidsHealth.org/classroom/6to8/personal/growing/media\\_literacy\\_health\\_handout1.pdf](http://KidsHealth.org/classroom/6to8/personal/growing/media_literacy_health_handout1.pdf)



Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Exploring the Surf

Instructions: The Internet can be a great resource for information about health-related issues. But not all websites are reliable sources. Review four websites that appear in a web search for a health-related issue.

1

Website name and URL:

Publisher or organization that operates the site:

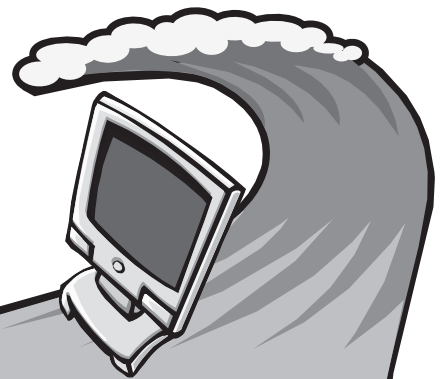
Is it reviewed by a doctor or medical expert?

Is the site current? When was it last updated?

Is there advertising on the site? If yes, how might this influence the information on the site?

Is the information on the website documented?

Are the links relevant and functioning?





Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Exploring the Surf

2

Website name and URL:

Publisher or organization that operates the site:

Is it reviewed by a doctor or medical expert?

Is the site current? When was it last updated?

Is there advertising on the site? If yes, how might this influence the information on the site?

Is the information on the website documented?

Are the links relevant and functioning?





Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Exploring the Surf

3

Website name and URL:

Publisher or organization that operates the site:

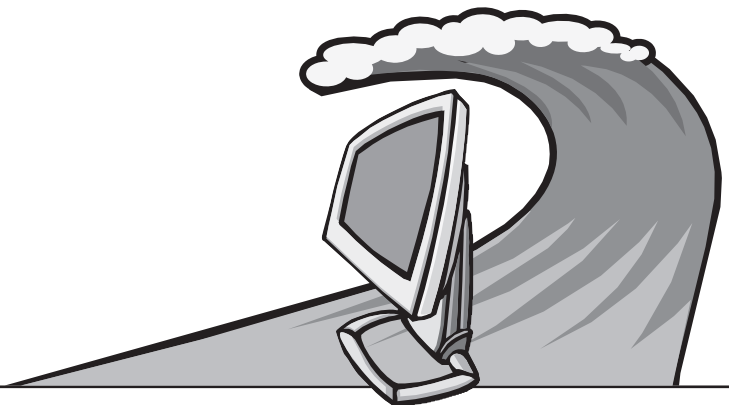
Is it reviewed by a doctor or medical expert?

Is the site current? When was it last updated?

Is there advertising on the site? If yes, how might this influence the information on the site?

Is the information on the website documented?

Are the links relevant and functioning?







Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Exploring the Surf

4

Website name and URL:

Publisher or organization that operates the site:

Is it reviewed by a doctor or medical expert?

Is the site current? When was it last updated?

Is there advertising on the site? If yes, how might this influence the information on the site?

Is the information on the website documented?

Are the links relevant and functioning?





Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Exploring the Surf

Review your answers, then write about your findings. These questions can help you get started:

- Which site or sites appear to be good sources of health-related information?
- Which site or sites do not appear to be good sources of health-related information?
- Did anything surprise you as you reviewed the sites?
- Will this study affect how you use the Internet in the future? If so, how?

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(/)

Menu



University of Iowa  
Stead Family  
Children's Hospital

Home (/)

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# Online health information - what can you trust?

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## Definition

When you have a question about your or your family's health, you may look it up on the Internet. You can find accurate health information on many sites. But, you are also likely to run across a lot of questionable, even false content. How can you tell the difference?

To find health information you can trust, you have to know where and how to look. These tips can help.

## What to Look For

With a bit of detective work, you can find information you can trust.

- Search for websites of well-known health institutions. Medical schools, professional health organizations, and hospitals often provide online health content.
- Look for ".gov," ".edu," or ".org" in the web address. A ".gov" address means the site is run by a government agency. A ".edu" address indicates an educational institution. And a ".org" address often means a professional organization runs the site. A ".com" address means a for-profit company runs the site. It may still have some good information, but the content may be biased.

- Find out who wrote or reviewed the content. Look for health care providers such as doctors (MDs), nurses (RNs), or other licensed health professionals. Also look for an editorial policy. This policy can tell you where the site gets its content or how it is created.
- Look for scientific references. Content is more reliable if it is based on scientific studies. Professional journals are good references. These include the *Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA)* and the *New England Journal of Medicine*. Recent editions of medical textbooks are also good references.
- Look for the contact information on the site. You should be able to reach the site sponsor by telephone, email, or a mailing address.
- No matter where you find the information, check how old the content is. Even trusted sites may have out-of-date information archived. Look for content that is no more than 2 to 3 years old. Individual pages may have a date at the bottom that says when it was last updated. Or the home page may have such a date.
- Beware of chat rooms and discussion groups. The content in these forums is typically not reviewed or regulated. Plus it may come from people who are not experts, or who are trying to sell something.
- DO NOT rely on just one website. Compare the information you find on a site with content from other sites. Make sure other sites can back up the information you have found.

## Things to Keep in Mind

While searching for health information online, use common sense and be wary.

- If it seems too good to be true, it probably is. Beware of quick-fix cures. And remember that a money-back guarantee does not mean that something works.
- As with any kind of website, it is important to be careful with your personal information. DO NOT give out your Social Security number. Before you buy anything, be sure that the site has a secure server. This will help protect your credit card information. You can tell by looking in the box near the top of the screen that cites the web address. At the start of the web address, look for "https".
- Personal stories are not scientific fact. Just because someone claims that their personal health story is true, it does not mean that it is. But even if it is true, the same treatment may not apply to your case. Only your provider can help you find the care that is best for you.

## Where to Start

Here are a few high-quality resources to get you started.

- American Heart.org -- [www.americanheart.org](http://www.americanheart.org): Information on heart disease and ways to prevent disease. From the American Heart Association.
- Diabetes.org -- [www.diabetes.org](http://www.diabetes.org): Information on diabetes and ways to prevent, manage, and treat the disease. From the American Diabetes Association.
- Familydoctor.org -- [www.familydoctor.org](http://www.familydoctor.org): General health information for families. Produced by the American Academy of Family Physicians.
- Healthfinder.gov -- [healthfinder.gov/](http://healthfinder.gov/): General health information. Produced by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.
- HealthyChildren.org -- [www.healthychildren.org/English/Pages/default.aspx](http://www.healthychildren.org/English/Pages/default.aspx): Information on children's health. From the American Academy of Pediatrics.
- CDC -- [www.cdc.gov/](http://www.cdc.gov/): Health information for older adults. From the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.
- NIHSeniorHealth.gov -- [www.nihseniorhealth.gov](http://www.nihseniorhealth.gov): Health information for older adults. From the National Institutes of Health.

## When to Call the Doctor

It is great that you are seeking information to help you manage your health. But keep in mind that online health information can never replace a talk with your provider. Talk to your provider if you have questions about your health, your treatment, or anything you read online. It can be helpful to print out the articles you have read and bring them with you to your appointment.

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## Revision

Last Reviewed 9/3/2016 by Linda J. Vorvick, MD, Clinical Associate Professor, Department of Family Medicine, UW Medicine, School of Medicine, University of Washington, Seattle, WA. Also reviewed by David Zieve, MD, MHA, Isla Ogilvie, PhD, and the A.D.A.M. Editorial team.

## Disclaimers

- The information provided herein should not be used during any medical emergency or for the diagnosis or treatment of any medical condition.
- A licensed medical professional should be consulted for diagnosis and treatment of any and all medical conditions.
- Call 911 for all medical emergencies.
- Links to other sites are provided for information only -- they do not constitute endorsements of those other sites.

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### Contact Information

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# University of Iowa Stead Family Children's Hospital

Changing Medicine. Changing **Kids' Lives.**®



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(<https://www.youtube.com/user/UIChildrens>)



(<https://twitter.com/uichildrens>)



(<https://www.flickr.com/photos/uichildrens/collections>)

## University of Iowa Health Care

- Stead Family Department of Pediatrics (<http://www.medicine.uiowa.edu/pediatrics/>)
- UI Hospitals and Clinics (<http://www.uihc.org>)
- UI Carver College of Medicine (<http://www.medicine.uiowa.edu>)
- UI Physicians (<https://www.medicine.uiowa.edu/uiphyicians/>)

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# Persuasive Techniques in Advertising

The persuasive strategies used by advertisers who want you to buy their product can be divided into three categories: **pathos**, **logos**, and **ethos**.

**Pathos**: an appeal to emotion.

An advertisement using **pathos** will attempt to evoke an emotional response in the consumer. Sometimes, it is a positive emotion such as happiness: *an image of people enjoying themselves while drinking Pepsi*. Other times, advertisers will use negative emotions such as pain: *a person having back problems after buying the "wrong" mattress*. **Pathos** can also include emotions such as fear and guilt: *images of a starving child persuade you to send money*.

**Logos**: an appeal to logic or reason.

An advertisement using **logos** will give you the evidence and statistics you need to fully understand what the product does. The **logos** of an advertisement will be the "straight facts" about the product: *One glass of Florida orange juice contains 75% of your daily Vitamin C needs*.

**Ethos**: an appeal to credibility or character.

An advertisement using **ethos** will try to convince you that the company is more reliable, honest, and credible; therefore, you should buy its product. **Ethos** often involves statistics from reliable experts, such as *nine out of ten dentists agree that Crest is the better than any other brand* or *Americas dieters choose Lean Cuisine*. Often, a celebrity endorses a product to lend it more credibility: *Catherine Zeta-Jones makes us want to switch to T-Mobile*.

Practice labeling **pathos**, **logos**, and **ethos** by placing a **P**, **L**, or **E** in the blank :

- \_\_\_\_\_ A child is shown covered in bug bites after using an inferior bug spray.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Tiger Woods endorses Nike.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Sprite Zero is 100% sugar-free.
- \_\_\_\_\_ A 32-oz. bottle of Tide holds enough to wash 32 loads.
- \_\_\_\_\_ A commercial shows an image of a happy couple riding in a Corvette.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Cardiologists recommend Ecotrin more than any other brand of aspirin.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Advil Liqui-Gels provide up to 8 hours of continuous pain relief.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Miley Cyrus appears in Oreo advertisements.
- \_\_\_\_\_ People who need more energy drink Red Bull Energy Drink.
- \_\_\_\_\_ A magazine ad shows people smiling while smoking cigarettes.

# Persuasive Techniques in Advertising

The following are some more specific strategies that advertisers use. Often, they overlap with the rhetorical strategies above.

## **Avante Garde**

The suggestion that using this product puts the user ahead of the times. *A toy manufacturer encourages kids to be the first on their block to have a new toy.*

## **Weasel Words**

“Weasel words” are used to suggest a positive meaning without actually really making any guarantee. *A scientist says that a diet product might help you to lose weight the way it helped him to lose weight. A dish soap leaves dishes virtually spotless.*

## **Magic Ingredients**

The suggestion that some almost miraculous discovery makes the product exceptionally effective. *A pharmaceutical manufacturer describes a special coating that makes their pain reliever less irritating to the stomach than a competitor’s.*

## **Patriotism**

The suggestion that purchasing this product shows your love of your country. *A company brags about its product being made in America.*

## **Transfer**

Positive words, images, and ideas are used to suggest that the product being sold is also positive. *A textile manufacturer wanting people to wear their product to stay cool during the summer shows people wearing fashions made from their cloth at a sunny seaside setting where there is a cool breeze.*

## **Plain Folks**

The suggestion that the product is a practical product of good value for ordinary people. *A cereal manufacturer shows an ordinary family sitting down to breakfast and enjoying their product.*

## **Snob Appeal**

The suggestion that the use of the product makes the customer part of an elite group with a luxurious and glamorous lifestyle. *A coffee manufacturer shows people dressed in formal gowns and tuxedos drinking their brand at an art gallery.*

## **Bribery**

Bribery offers you something “extra.” *Buy a burger; get free fries.*

## **Bandwagon**

The suggestion that you should join the crowd or be on the winning side by using a product—you don’t want to be the only person without it!

## Analyzing Ads

Choose six advertisements—two magazine ads, two television commercials, and two internet-based advertisements—and explain how each uses pathos, logos, and ethos. Not every advertisement will use all three, but examine the ad carefully before you decide to write “none.” Also list any other strategies used. Refer to the definitions and examples given earlier for help.

Product Name	Use of <b>pathos</b>	Use of <b>logos</b>	Use of <b>ethos</b>	Other <b>strategies</b>
Product 1				
Product 2				
Product 3				
Product 4				
Product 5				
Product 6				