

# *Cardiovascular Health Information on the Internet*



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The purpose of this guide is to help people with a cardiovascular condition and their families to find sources of information and support. This list is not meant to be comprehensive, but rather to provide starting points for information seeking.

## **Recommended Websites**

- **CardioSmart.org**

Access at: <http://www.cardiosmart.org/>

Provided by the American College of Cardiology, this site includes detailed information about heart conditions, tests and treatments, a news section, and a questions & answers database.

- **HeartHub for Patients**

Access at: <http://www.hearthub.org/>

Provided by the American Heart Association, this site contains written information, video, and illustrations explaining heart disorders and conditions, stroke, and healthy lifestyle. The site also includes news about research and treatment developments and personal stories of people living with heart conditions. Health tools such as calculators and trackers help people manage their health.

- **National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute –NHLIB**

Access at: <http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/>

The National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute is part of the National Institutes of Health. The “Diseases and Conditions Index” links to information about specific conditions, treatments, and procedures. The site includes web-based tutorials on specific issues and printer-friendly versions of the Institute’s publications.

## Recommended Web sites on general health

- **Familydoctor.org**

Access at: <http://www.familydoctor.org/>

This site is provided by the American Academy of Family Physicians and has an extensive section on heart disease and stroke covering diseases and conditions, reducing risk, drugs and devices, recovery, and heart problems in kids. The information is provided in concise, easy-to-read overviews.

- **MedlinePlus.gov**

Access at: <http://www.medlineplus.gov/>

The National Library of Medicine web-portal is a comprehensive list of links to authoritative and reliable information about all aspects of health. In addition to the links the site includes a medical encyclopedia, a dictionary, drug and supplements information, health news, and directories of specialists and resources. The interactive tutorials are slide-shows with graphics and sound that explain over 165 medical conditions, diagnostic tests, and procedures. The surgery videos are hour-long video files of actual procedures with explanations and commentaries by the surgeons.

- **University of Michigan Health System – Patient Education**

→ Access at: <http://www.med.umich.edu/>

→ Click on “Health Topics A-Z”

This section offers overviews of specific health topics and drug information.

- **UpToDate Patient Information**

→ Access at: <http://www.patients.uptodate.com/>

→ Point your cursor over “View Patient-Level Health Topics by Category”

→ Click on “Heart Disease”

→ Select a topic from the list

Detailed, comprehensive overviews of medical conditions and treatments based on professional literature reviews written by physicians and updated regularly. The overviews include some medical terminology. They are suitable for readers seeking to gain in-depth understanding of coronary heart disease.

## Proceed With Caution!

*"The Internet is a wild frontier whose landscape changes frequently. It contains all sorts of health information—good and bad, true and false, complete and dangerously incomplete. Before you act on anything you learn online, we recommend that you make sure you check with your doctor."*

--Consumer Reports

- Anyone with a computer can set up a website! It is easier to publish information on the Internet than to publish books, magazines and other traditional forms of communication.
- Some sites on the Internet were created in order to promote a product or the opinion of the site's creator; therefore, the information they present may be biased. It is important to weigh Internet information in the context of the site creator's motive.
- In a similar manner to checking the credentials of a healthcare provider, it is necessary to check the credentials of an Internet information provider. It is important to know if the information is provided by a health professional or by a lay person.

**If you obtain health information from sites other than the ones listed above, or from listservs or blogs, please be sure to evaluate the information according to the following guidelines:**

Check the site's URL (address). The last segment of the URL before the / gives a general indication of the organization sponsoring the site, for example:

- .edu – site provided by a university or a learning institution
  - .gov – site provided by a government agency
  - .com – site provided by a commercial company
  - .org – site provided by a non-profit organization
- Read the "About us" or "Who are we?" section of the site. A reputable site should include this section. This is where a user can learn about the credentials and intentions of the site's creator.
  - Check the date the information was last revised. Look for sites that offer fresh content that is updated regularly.
  - Stick by government or university run sites. Other credible sources include medical associations and hospitals.
  - Remember: the information on email groups (listservs), blogs, and chats is anecdotal, and not scientifically proven. Check this information with your doctor.

## Share information you found on the Internet with your doctor

Heart conditions and disorders are complex diseases with many factors and variables that affect diagnosis, prognosis and treatment decisions. Every patient is a unique case with a different set of circumstances. Even if the information you find on the Internet is accurate and current, it may not be applicable to your specific situation. To understand how the information you find relates to your case, you must consult with your doctor.

The following are suggestions to promote efficient and effective communication between you and your doctor:

**1. Be organized.**

Keep your printouts well-organized in a folder or in a set of labeled folders that will allow you to find each piece quickly.

**2. Prepare a list.**

Review the information before the appointment and prepare a set of questions with the most important and relevant ones first. Next to the questions record the information sources on which they are based. These references will help you to pull out a specific piece if the doctor asks for it. Be realistic in planning a reasonable number of questions within the time constraints of your appointment.

**3. Keep a record of what was said.**

It is difficult to maintain a conversation and take good notes at the same time. Bring a friend or a family member who can take the notes. You may also ask for permission to tape the conversation. This will help you to recall what was said in the meeting after it is over.

When searching for information on diseases of the heart, it is important to establish a good foundation of knowledge about the condition before focusing the search on treatment options. A good understanding of the illness and its specific aspects will help the information seeker retrieve more relevant information and ask better questions.

This document is not intended to take the place of the care and attention of your personal physician or other professional medical services. Our aim is to promote active participation in your care and treatment by providing information and education. Questions about individual health concerns or specific treatment options should be discussed with your physician.

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Compiled by Ruti Volk, MSI, Wellness Resource Center Librarian