

# MedlinePlus Evaluating Internet Health Information: A Tutorial

From the National Library of Medicine

Revised August 2023

## Chapters:

1. [Introduction](#)
2. [Provider and Purpose](#)
3. [Information Quality](#)
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## *Introduction*

Welcome to the Evaluating Internet Health Information tutorial from the National Library of Medicine.

Using the internet to find health information is easier than ever. Sometimes it even finds its way to you when you aren't searching for it. For example, someone you know or follow on social media may share a link to online health content. Or they may share a photo or meme with health-related content. But how can you be sure the information is trustworthy? Health information that is false, not accurate, or misleading is known as misinformation.

Often, we don't realize we're sharing misinformation. Misinformation can be many things. Sometimes it is out-of-date facts or research. It can also be memes that started as jokes but now people take them seriously. Sometimes it is content meant to grab your attention. But if you share a social media post without being sure the content is trustworthy, you could be spreading misinformation. Sharing misinformation can be dangerous and even harmful.

You might feel overwhelmed knowing that misinformation is out there, but don't worry! By the end of this tutorial, you will have the tools to help you identify trustworthy health information online.

As an example, imagine that your doctor just told you that you have high cholesterol. You want to learn more about it before your next doctor's appointment. So, you do an online search and find these two websites.



**Institute for a Healthier Heart**  
"Helping families live healthier lives since 2015"

Healthy Living | Shop

Blood Pressure   Cholesterol   Heart Disease   Children & Heart Health

### Latest Heart News

-  Treating Sleep Apnea Reduces Heart Disease Deaths  
[Read more >>](#)
-  Low-Level Jobs Linked with Faster, Less Variable Heart Rates - and Higher Heart Risk
-  Social Connections: Could Heartwarming Be...
-  Enlarged Waist + Elevated Triglycerides = Higher Risks for Women

Learn how a **revolutionary new drug** can help

About this Site

## Physicians Academy for Better Health

Diseases & Conditions   Diet & Nutrition   Exercise   Medication & Treatment



Genetics may explain why some people can lower their cholesterol by altering their diet and exercise habits while others who take similar measures do not see significant decreases.

A study comparing the cholesterol levels of twins with starkly different body types and exercise habits found that the twins showed the same response to high-fat or low-fat diets. This suggests that genetics may determine how a person's cholesterol responds to dietary or lifestyle changes. The study was in the July 2023 issue of the *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*.

### What the Numbers Mean

Cholesterol levels are measured in milligrams (mg) of cholesterol per deciliter (dl) of blood.

Total Cholesterol Level	Category
Less than 200 mg/dL	Desirable
200-239 mg/dL	Borderline High
240 mg/dL, and above	High

Source: NHLBI

**Sign up** for our newsletter.

**ADVERTISEMENT**  
Regular exercise is important for people of all ages.  
This exercise program shows you how to start and stick with a program of stretching, balance, and strength-training.



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*These two examples of websites were made-up for this tutorial. But they show different ways that content may be arranged.*

Both sites look professional, but anyone can put up a web page that looks good. This tutorial will take a closer look at these websites to show you how to uncover important clues about the quality of health information you might find online.

This tutorial explores three categories of questions to ask:

### 1) Provider and Purpose

In this case, “provider” means the people or organization that provides the information. You can’t trust health information if you don’t know where it comes from. So, you’ll need to ask:

- Who manages the site?
- Why have they created the site? What is their purpose?
- What do they want from you?
- Who is paying for the site? Does the site’s information favor the sponsor?

### 2) Information Quality

You don’t want to make health decisions based on inaccurate information. These questions will help determine whether you can trust that you’re getting the facts:

- Is the information reviewed by experts?
- Where did the information come from?
- Does the site make claims that sound too good to be true?
- Is the information up to date?

### 3) Privacy

A trustworthy website will be clear about its privacy policies. Check to see:

- Does the site ask for your personal information?
- If so, how will it be used?

You can usually find most of the answers on a website’s main page or the "About Us" page. Let’s look at the two sample websites for clues to help figure out if they are trustworthy.

### Evaluating Internet Health Information: Provider and Purpose—Part 1 of 6

The first step to evaluating internet health information is to find out who is managing the site (the provider) and why (the purpose).

Let's begin with the Physicians Academy for Better Health site.

Physicians Academy for Better Health sounds like a very reliable site. But you can't go by the name alone.

To find out who created the site and why, look for the "About" or "About Us" link. On some sites, the "About" or "About Us" link may be located at the bottom of the homepage in the footer or at the top in the header. This is the first stop in the search for clues about a website's reliability.

It should say who is managing the website, and why. A mission or values statement often includes this information.

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The link to information about a site is often found either near the top of the page or toward the bottom, as shown in this example.

On the "About Us" page, we learn that the organization's mission, or purpose, is to "educate the public on disease prevention and healthy living."

## Physicians Academy for Better Health

[Diseases & Conditions](#) [Diet & Nutrition](#) [Exercise](#) [Medication & Treatment](#)

### About Us

"Our mission is to educate the public on disease prevention and healthy living. We conduct research and provide information that empowers health care consumers to protect their health."

Rheumatologist Western Hospital	Hematologist/Oncologist Will University Affiliates	Gastroenterologist The Gastroenterology Group	Psychiatrist Capital Medical Group
Dennis Davis, M.D. Pediatrician Pediatric Medical Center	Alice Jones, M.S., LCSW Social Worker Wellness and Health Center	Bob Nelson, M.D. Cardiologist National Heart Center	Stewart Williams, M.S., P.T. Physical Therapist Doctors Hospital
Jane Doe, M.D. Cardiologist United Heart Clinics	Susan Martin, M.D. Obstetrician/Gynecologist Women's Hospital	John Smith, R.N. Nurse County Hospital	Bob Wilson, R.D. Dietitian Health Group of Gotham

#### Editorial Policy

Delivering cutting-edge, reliable information is our top priority. Our board of directors reviews the material that we disseminate on this site. We are committed to providing accurate, unbiased, research-based information. We regularly review the material on our site to ensure that it is current. We will not accept advertising that conflicts with our mission. Any advertising on our site will be labeled so that it is separated from medical content.

The information on this Web site is not a substitute for medical advice. Please consult with your physician before making any changes to your health regime.

[About Us](#) [Privacy Policy](#) [Site Map](#) [Email Us](#) [Physicians Academy for Better Health](#)  
2309 Anystreet, Anytown, USA | 555-USA-PABH

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*This example shows a mission statement on the "About Us" page.*

Now we know the purpose of the Physician's Academy for Better Health website. Let's see if their "About Us" page tells us who is providing the information.

### Evaluating Internet Health Information: Provider and Purpose—Part 2 of 6

On the "About Us" page, we learn this site is managed by a board of directors made up of health care professionals. The page also lists their areas of expertise.

Two board members are cardiologists (doctors who specialize in heart health).

This is important because you want reliable information about cholesterol, which affects heart health.

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### Board of Directors

<p>Steve Brown, M.D. Rheumatologist Western Hospital</p>	<p>Dan Harris, M.D. Hematologist/Oncologist Will University Affiliates</p>	<p>Kathleen Miller, Ph.D., M.D. Gastroenterologist The Gastroenterology Group</p>	<p>Stacy Thomas, M.D. Psychiatrist Capital Medical Group</p>
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*This example shows how knowing who is providing the information can help you to decide if you can trust the site.*

Trustworthy sites also provide a way to contact the owners with questions or comments. So, check to see if there is a way to contact the organization managing the site.

This site provides an email address, a mailing address, and a phone number.

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[Diseases & Conditions](#)
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The information on this Web site is not a substitute for your health regime.

[About Us](#)
[Privacy Policy](#)
[Site](#)

**Email Us**

**Physicians Academy for Better Health**  
**2309 Anystreet, Anytown, USA | 555-USA-PABH**

*In this example, the contact information is located at the bottom of the page. Other sites may have a "Contact Us" page with their contact information or a form for sending questions or comments.*

Now let's go to the other site and look for the same clues.

*Evaluating Internet Health Information: Provider and Purpose—Part 3 of 6*

The Institute for a Healthier Heart manages this website. They have an "About this Site" link.

**Institute for a Healthier Heart**  
*"Helping families live healthier lives since 2015"*

Healthy Living | Shop

Blood Pressure    Cholesterol    Heart Disease    Children & Heart Health

### Latest Heart News

-  Treating Sleep Apnea Reduces Heart Disease Deaths [Read more >>](#)
-  Low-Level Jobs Linked with Faster, Less Variable Heart Rates - and Higher Heart Risk [Read more >>](#)
-  Social Connections: Could Heartwarming Be Heart-Saving? [Read more >>](#)
-  Enlarged Waist + Elevated Triglycerides = Heart Stroke Risks for Women [Read more >>](#)

Learn how a **revolutionary new drug** can help your heart!

**About this Site**    Privacy Policy    Contact Us

**Join the Institute Now!**

Name:

Email:

Zip Code:

Age:

**Submit**

*This example shows another way that a website may name and locate their "About" page.*

This page says that the Institute consists of "individuals and businesses concerned with heart health."

Who are these individuals? Who are these businesses? It doesn't say. A trustworthy health website clearly identifies who is providing the information. Sometimes missing pieces of information can provide important clues!

**Institute for a Healthier Heart**  
 "Helping families live healthier lives since 2015"

Healthy Living | Shop

Blood Pressure    Cholesterol    Heart Disease    Children & Heart Health

### About this Site

The Institute for a Healthier Heart is run by a select group of individuals and businesses concerned with heart health.

Your heart health is our top priority. We have been helping families live healthier lives since 2015, thanks in part to the support of HeartDrugz, a company that produces high-quality vitamins and medication. You can help with the important work of the Institute for a Healthier Heart by becoming a [member](#) now.

[About this Site](#)    [Privacy Policy](#)    [Contact Us](#)

*In this example, the people who manage this site are not clearly identified.*

Next, let's check the Institute's purpose.

*Evaluating Internet Health Information: Provider and Purpose—Part 4 of 6*

The Institute’s mission is “to provide the public with heart health information and to offer related services.”

Can you tell if these services are free? The real purpose might be to sell you something.

If you keep reading, you’ll learn that a company that makes vitamins and medicines helps pay for the site.

The site might favor that particular company and its products.

**Institute for a Healthier Heart**  
*“Helping families live healthier lives since 2015”*

Healthy Living | Shop

Blood Pressure    Cholesterol    Heart Disease    Children & Heart Health

### About this Site

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**“...the support of HeartDrugz, a company that produces high-quality vitamins and medication.”**

becoming a [member](#) now.

About this Site    Privacy Policy    Contact Us

*This example shows why it is important to read the information about the site.*

What about contact information? There is a "Contact Us" link, but no other contact information is provided.

**Institute for a Healthier Heart**  
*"Helping families live healthier lives since 2015"*

Healthy Living | Shop

Blood Pressure    Cholesterol    Heart Disease    Children & Heart Health

### Latest Heart News

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- Enlarged Waist + Elevated Triglycerides = Heart Stroke Risks for Women [Read more >>](#)

Learn how a **revolutionary new drug** can help your heart!

**Join the Institute Now!**

Name:

Email:

Zip Code:

Age:

[Submit](#)

[Contact Us](#)

[About this Site](#)    [Privacy Policy](#)

*This example shows that contact information may be harder to find and/or contain less information on some sites.*

*Evaluating Internet Health Information: Provider and Purpose—Part 5 of 6*

Did you notice that the Institute for a Healthier Heart website has a link to an online shop?

That's a clue that the site's main purpose may be to sell something and not just to offer information. But the site may not explain this directly. You need to investigate!

**Institute for a Healthier Heart**  
*"Helping families live healthier lives since 2015"*

Healthy Living **Shop**

Blood Pressure    Cholesterol    Heart Disease    Children & Heart Health

### Latest Heart News

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Learn how a **revolutionary new drug** can help your heart!

#### Join the Institute Now!

Name:

Email:

Zip Code:

Age:

**Submit**

[About this Site](#)    [Privacy Policy](#)    [Contact Us](#)

*A site with a shopping cart as a main item on the page may be mostly interested in selling you something.*

The online store includes products from HeartDrugz, the company that funds the site. This clue suggests that the site might show a preference for the drug company or its products.

Keep this in mind as you browse the site.

**Institute for a Healthier Heart**  
*"Helping families live healthier lives since 2015"*

Healthy Living | Shop

Blood Pressure    Cholesterol    Heart Disease    Children & Heart Health

## Shopping Cart

[Checkout](#)



HeartDrugz vitamins can help keep you strong and prevent disease.

**Buy Now \$35.00**



This cookbook of heart-healthy recipes will make your stomach happy as well.

**Buy Now \$25.00**



Keep track of doctor appointments and other important medical information with this health journal. A great gift for the ones you love.

**Buy Now \$25.00**

[About this Site](#)    [Privacy Policy](#)    [Contact Us](#)

*On this page you can see that the site's sponsor is selling heart vitamins on the site. This could create a conflict of interest that influences the type of information that the website offers.*

### Evaluating Internet Health Information: Provider and Purpose—Part 6 of 6

Both of the example sites have advertisements.

When you see advertisements on a site, check if it is easy to tell the ads from the health information.

On the Physicians Academy page, the ad is clearly labeled as an advertisement. You can easily tell it apart from the content on the page. That's a good thing. They are making sure you don't confuse ads with their health information.

## Physicians Academy for Better Health

Diseases & Conditions
Diet & Nutrition
Exercise
Medication & Treatment

Genetics may explain why some people can lower their cholesterol by altering their diet and exercise habits while others who take similar measures do not see significant decreases.

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Source: NHLBI



ADVERTISEMENT

Regular exercise is important for people of all ages.

This exercise program shows you how to start and stick with a program of stretching, balance, and strength-training.



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*This example shows what an ad may look like when it is clearly labeled as advertisement.*

On the Institute for a Healthier Heart site, the advertisement is not labeled as an ad. It is hard to tell the difference between the ad and the content. This may be done to encourage you to buy something.

**Institute for a Healthier Heart**  
*"Helping families live healthier lives since 2015"*

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### Latest Heart News

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**Learn how a revolutionary new drug can help your heart!**

**Join the Institute Now!**

Name:

Email:

Zip Code:

Age:

**Submit**

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*In this example, the ad is not identified. You need to decide if the website is more interested in promoting a product or offering actual health information.*

Next, let's look at evaluating information quality.

### *Evaluating Internet Health Information: Information Quality—Part 1 of 4*

You now have some clues about who is publishing each site and why. But how can you tell if the information on these websites is high-quality?

First, find out where the information comes from or who writes it. Look for phrases like "editorial board," "selection policy," "editorial policy," or "review process." They usually point you in the right direction.

To look for these phrases, let's go back to the "About Us" page of the Physicians Academy for Better Health site.

They include their editorial policy. It says that the Board of Directors reviews all medical information before it is posted on the website.

We learned earlier that these board members are mostly trained health care professionals, including doctors and nurses. So, we know that they are qualified to review and approve medical content. The board makes sure that the information on the site meets their standards for quality.

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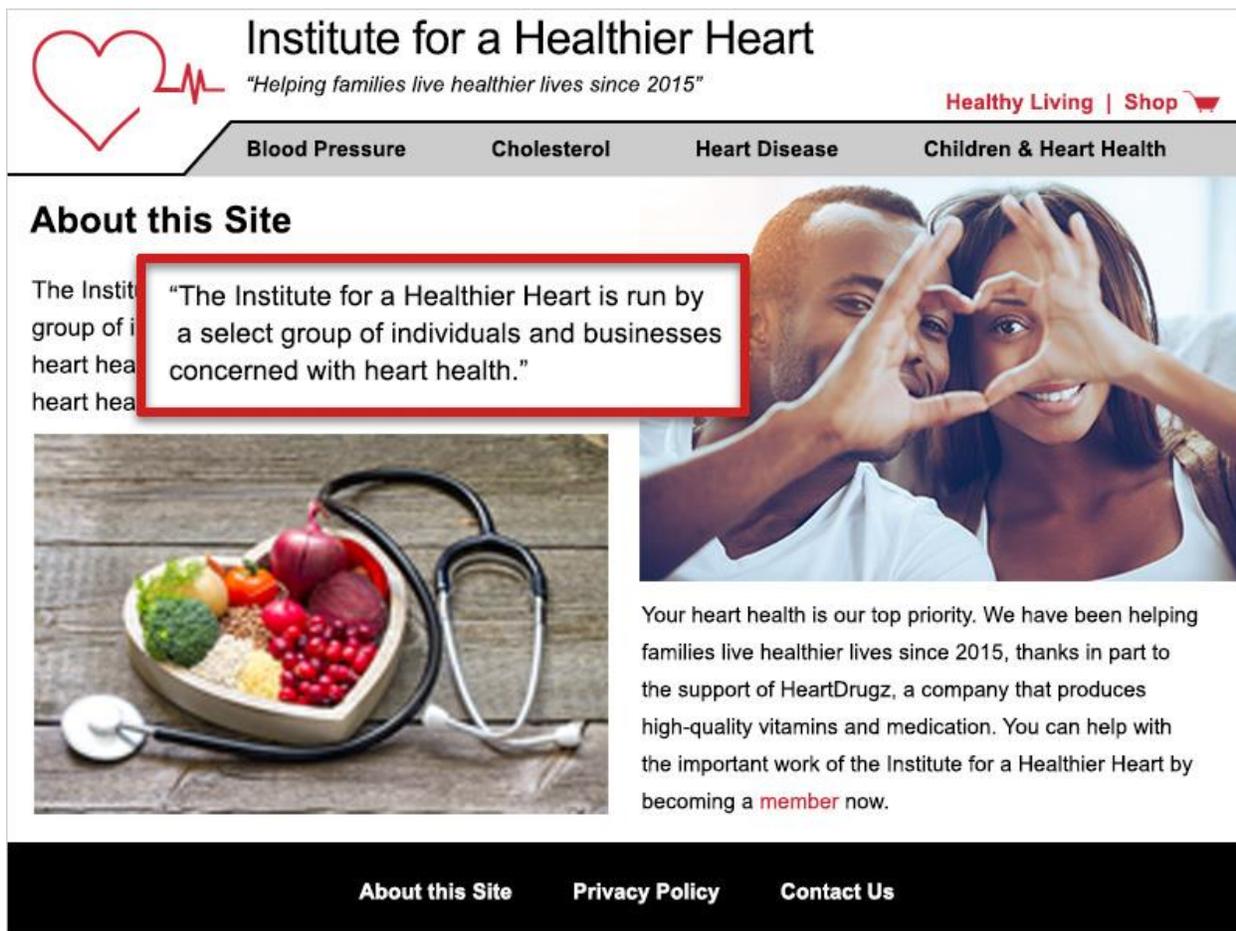
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*This example shows a clearly stated policy that explains how the Physician's Academy controls the quality of their information.*

Let's see what the Institute for a Healthier Heart says about controlling the quality of their information.

You already know that a "group of individuals and businesses" is managing this site. But you don't know who these individuals are or if they are medical experts. There is no information to help you decide if these individuals are qualified to choose accurate or quality content.



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Blood Pressure    Cholesterol    Heart Disease    Children & Heart Health

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*This example shows how unclear a website's information sources and quality can be.*

So far, what do you think about the quality of information from the Institute for a Healthier Heart?

### *Evaluating Internet Health Information: Information Quality—Part 2 of 4*

You learned from earlier clues that a drug company sponsors the Institute’s website. It’s possible that this company writes information for the website in order to promote itself and the products it sells. If this is the case, the information provided is biased and could be misleading.

Even if experts review the information that is posted on a site, you should continue to ask questions.

Look to see if the site clearly tells you where the information came from. Good sites should rely on medical research, not opinions. So, check to see if they give you the source of any research they mention.

It should also be clear who wrote the content.

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becoming a **member** now.

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*This example says the site is getting support from a drug company, showing why reviewing the site information is important.*

Let’s compare what these websites tell you about where they get their content.

*Evaluating Internet Health Information: Information Quality—Part 3 of 4*

The Physicians Academy for Better Health site clearly labels the sources of their information.

## Physicians Academy for Better Health

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*The Physicians Academy for Better Health site shows how information sources may appear on a website. This site even provides links to the sources so you can easily check them.*

On the other website, we see a page that mentions a research study. Yet there are no details about who did the study or when it was done. There is no link to the study. It doesn't even say where the study was published. You have no way of checking if their information is correct. Could this study include misinformation?

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Healthy Living | Shop

Blood Pressure **Cholesterol** Heart Disease Children & Heart Health

## Cholesterol

Your blood cholesterol level has a strong correlation to your chances of getting heart disease. High blood cholesterol is a major risk factor for heart disease. Each year, over a million Americans have heart attacks and about a half million people die from heart disease. It is important that you know your cholesterol levels, both for your good (HDL) cholesterol and your bad (LDL) cholesterol.

A recent research study found that genetics also play a significant role. Genetics might impact how your cholesterol levels respond to diet and lifestyle changes. That is why it is so important for you to work in partnership with your healthcare provider.

**"A recent research study found that genetics also play a significant role."**

About this Site Privacy Policy Contact Us

*The Institute for a Healthier Heart site makes only a vague reference to a "recent research study."*

### Evaluating Internet Health Information: Information Quality—Part 4 of 4

Here are a few more tips for evaluating the quality of health information:

**Look at the general tone of the information. Is it too emotional?** Does it sound too good to be true? Be cautious about sites that make unbelievable claims or promote "miracle cures." That could be misinformation. Neither example site presents information this way.

**Check to see if the information is current.** Out-of-date information can be hazardous to your health and is one form of misinformation. It may not reflect the latest research or treatments. Look for signs that the site is reviewed and updated regularly.

On the Physicians Academy site, the bottom of the page shows when the information was last reviewed to make sure it's still accurate.

## Physicians Academy for Better Health

Diseases & Conditions
Diet & Nutrition
Exercise
Medication & Treatment

Genetics may explain why some people can lower their cholesterol by altering their diet and exercise habits while others who take similar measures do not see significant decreases.

A study comparing the cholesterol levels of twins with starkly different body types and exercise habits found that the twins showed the same response to high-fat or low-fat diets. This suggests that genetics may determine how a person's cholesterol responds to dietary or lifestyle changes. The study was in the July 2023 issue of the [American Journal of Clinical Nutrition](#).

**What the Numbers Mean**

Cholesterol levels are measured in milligrams (mg) of cholesterol per deciliter (dl) of blood.

Total Cholesterol Level	Category
Less than 200 mg/dL	Desirable
200-239 mg/dL	Borderline High
240 mg/dL and above	High

Source: NHLBI



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Regular exercise is important for people of all ages.

This exercise program shows you how to start and stick with a program of stretching, balance, and strength-training.



Information Last Reviewed 6/29/2023

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Physicians Academy for Better Health  
 2309 Anystreet, Anytown, USA | 555-USA-PABH

The Physicians Academy for Better Health site shows the date of the last review.

There are no dates on the Institute's pages. You do not know if the information is current, and there is no way to tell when the content was last updated.

**Institute for a Healthier Heart**  
*"Helping families live healthier lives since 2015"*

Healthy Living | Shop

Blood Pressure    Cholesterol    Heart Disease    Children & Heart Health

### Latest Heart News

-  Treating Sleep Apnea Reduces Heart Disease Deaths [Read more >>](#)
-  Low-Level Jobs Linked with Faster, Less Variable Heart Rates - and Higher Heart Risk [Read more >>](#)
-  Social Connections: Could Heartwarming Be Heart-Saving? [Read more >>](#)
-  Enlarged Waist + Elevated Triglycerides = Heart Stroke Risks for Women [Read more >>](#)

Learn how a **revolutionary new drug** can help your heart!

**Join the Institute Now!**

Name:

Email:

Zip Code:

Age:

[Submit](#)

[About this Site](#)    [Privacy Policy](#)    [Contact Us](#)

The Institute for a Healthier Heart site only shows the date when the organization itself was formed. You can't tell if the information is ever updated.

Next, we'll see what you need to know about privacy on health information sites.

### Evaluating Internet Health Information: Privacy—Part 1 of 3

Maintaining your privacy is another important thing to remember. Some sites ask for you to "sign up" or "become a member." Before you do, look for a privacy policy to see how the site will use your personal information.

The Physicians Academy site has a link to their privacy policy on every page.

## Physicians Academy for Better Health

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The Physicians Academy for Better Health site clearly provides a link to their privacy policy in the footer area of their site.

On this site, users can sign up for an email newsletter. This requires that you share your name and email address.

The privacy policy explains how your personal information will be used. It will not be sold or shared with other organizations.

Don't sign up for a newsletter unless you are comfortable with how your information will be used.

**Physicians Academy for Better Health**

[Diseases & Conditions](#) [Diet & Nutrition](#) [Exercise](#) [Medication & Treatment](#)

## Privacy Policy

Protecting your privacy is important to us. We do not collect personal information about you when you visit our Web site unless you choose to provide that information to us. We track the number of visitors to the various sections of our site and use this to identify system performance.

### Personally Provided Information

If you choose to provide us with personal information by sending an email or subscribing to our newsletter, we will use this information to respond to your message and to provide you with the material that you request. If provided, personally identifiable information is maintained in a database that is regularly purged. We do not give, share, sell, or transfer any personal information to a third party unless required by law.

**“If you choose to provide us with personal information by sending an email or subscribing to our newsletter...”**

### Cookies

A “cookie” is a small file stored on your hard disk allowing our Web site to remember information about your session. When you encounter a page that employs temporary cookies to make it easier to use the site’s dynamic features. The cookie and the information about your session will be destroyed shortly after you close your browser. If you choose not to receive cookies, you will still be able to use our site, but will be unable to use cookie-dependent features.

**“We do not give, share, sell, or transfer any personal information to a third party unless required by law.”**

[About Us](#) [Privacy Policy](#) [Site Map](#) [Email Us](#)

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Information Last Reviewed 6/29/2023

*In this example, the privacy policy says that it is your choice to provide your personal information. It also says what they will not do with your information.*

*Evaluating Internet Health Information: Privacy—Part 2 of 3*

The example website for the Institute for a Healthier Heart also has a privacy policy available.

The screenshot shows the homepage of the Institute for a Healthier Heart. At the top left is a logo featuring a red heart with a white ECG line. To its right is the text "Institute for a Healthier Heart" and the tagline "Helping families live healthier lives since 2015". On the top right, there is a link for "Healthy Living | Shop" with a shopping cart icon. Below the header is a navigation bar with four categories: "Blood Pressure", "Cholesterol", "Heart Disease", and "Children & Heart Health".

The main content area is titled "Latest Heart News" and features four news items, each with a small image, a title, and a "Read more >>" link:

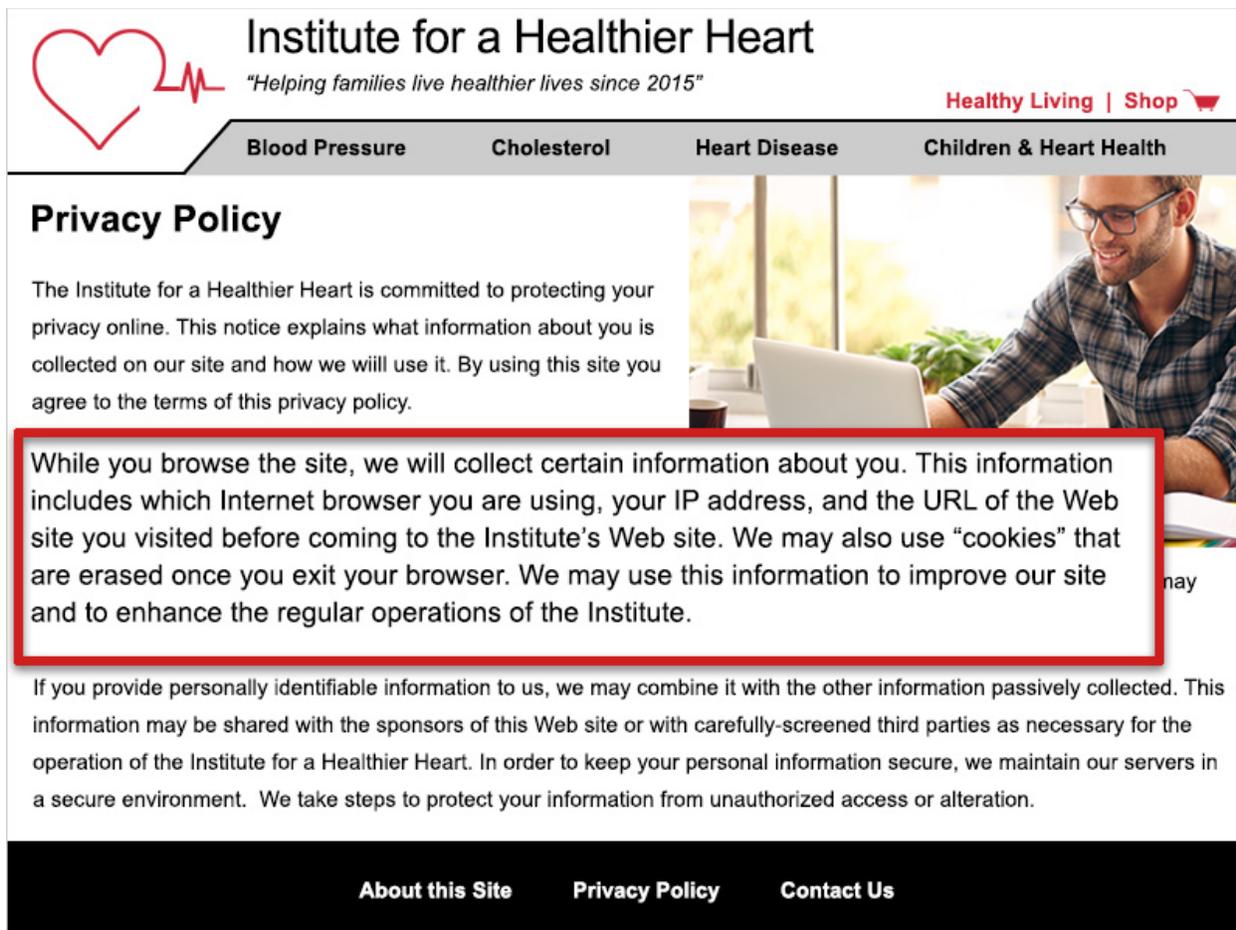
- Treating Sleep Apnea Reduces Heart Disease Deaths** (Image: A person sleeping in a hospital bed)
- Low-Level Jobs Linked with Faster, Less Variable Heart Rates - and Higher Heart Risk** (Image: A doctor examining a patient's blood pressure)
- Social Connections: Could Heartwarming Be Heart-Saving?** (Image: Two people sitting outdoors and talking)
- Enlarged Waist + Elevated Triglycerides = Heart Stroke Risks for Women** (Image: A person's waist being measured)

To the right of the news items is a large image of a woman in a red shirt forming a heart shape with her hands. Below this image is a "Join the Institute Now!" form with fields for Name, Email, Zip Code, and Age, and a "Submit" button.

At the bottom of the page is a dark navigation bar with links for "About this Site", "Privacy Policy" (highlighted with a red box), and "Contact Us".

*In this example, the link to the privacy policy is clearly visible.*

The privacy policy says that the Institute collects information about everyone who visits their website.



**Institute for a Healthier Heart**  
 "Helping families live healthier lives since 2015"  
 Healthy Living | Shop

Blood Pressure   Cholesterol   Heart Disease   Children & Heart Health

## Privacy Policy

The Institute for a Healthier Heart is committed to protecting your privacy online. This notice explains what information about you is collected on our site and how we will use it. By using this site you agree to the terms of this privacy policy.

**While you browse the site, we will collect certain information about you. This information includes which Internet browser you are using, your IP address, and the URL of the Web site you visited before coming to the Institute's Web site. We may also use "cookies" that are erased once you exit your browser. We may use this information to improve our site and to enhance the regular operations of the Institute.**

If you provide personally identifiable information to us, we may combine it with the other information passively collected. This information may be shared with the sponsors of this Web site or with carefully-screened third parties as necessary for the operation of the Institute for a Healthier Heart. In order to keep your personal information secure, we maintain our servers in a secure environment. We take steps to protect your information from unauthorized access or alteration.

About this Site   Privacy Policy   Contact Us

*In this example, we see that the website automatically collects certain information about you while you are browsing the site. But this information alone does not identify you.*

*Evaluating Internet Health Information: Privacy—Part 3 of 3*

The Institute site promotes a "membership" option that allows you to join the Institute.

And as you saw earlier, a store on this site allows you to buy products.

If you buy something or sign up for membership, you will be giving the Institute your personal information. Then your browsing history on the site can be linked with you specifically.

The screenshot shows the homepage of the Institute for a Healthier Heart. At the top left is a red heart icon with a pulse line. The main header reads "Institute for a Healthier Heart" with the tagline "Helping families live healthier lives since 2015". To the right is a "Healthy Living | Shop" link with a shopping cart icon. Below the header is a navigation bar with categories: "Blood Pressure", "Cholesterol", "Heart Disease", and "Children & Heart Health".

The main content area features a "Latest Heart News" section with four articles, each with a small image and a "Read more >>" link:

- Treating Sleep Apnea Reduces Heart Disease Deaths
- Low-Level Jobs Linked with Faster, Less Variable Heart Rates - and Higher Heart Risk
- Social Connections: Could Heartwarming Be H...
- Enlarged Waist + Elevated Triglycerides = Hea... Risks for Women

On the right side of the page is a large image of a woman in a red shirt forming a heart shape with her hands. Overlaid on this image is a "Join the Institute Now!" sign-up form with the following fields:

- Name:
- Email:
- Zip Code:
- Age:

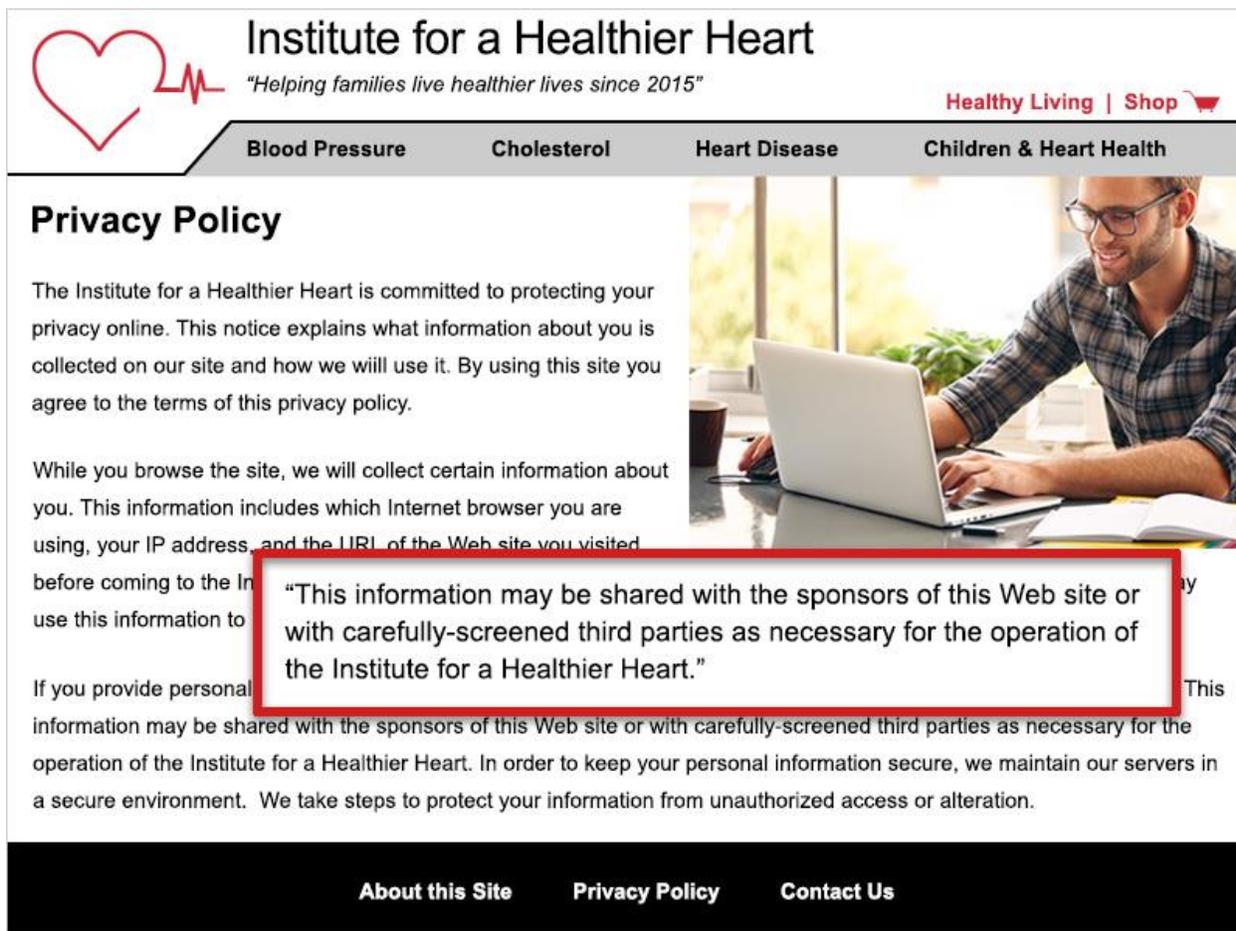
A red "Submit" button is located at the bottom right of the form. Below the main content area, there is a link: "Learn how a revolutionary new drug can help y...". At the bottom of the page is a black footer with white text: "About this Site", "Privacy Policy", and "Contact Us".

*This example shows that your name, zip code and age are being requested. If you provide this information, it will identify you personally.*

Before you provide any personal information, it's important to know how it will be used.

From the privacy policy, you can learn that the Institute will share your personal information with the company that sponsors the site. It may also be shared with others.

Only share your information if you are comfortable with how it will be used.



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While you browse the site, we will collect certain information about you. This information includes which Internet browser you are using, your IP address, and the URL of the Web site you visited before coming to the Institute for a Healthier Heart. We will use this information to improve our site and to provide you with a better user experience.

If you provide personal information, this information may be shared with the sponsors of this Web site or with carefully-screened third parties as necessary for the operation of the Institute for a Healthier Heart. In order to keep your personal information secure, we maintain our servers in a secure environment. We take steps to protect your information from unauthorized access or alteration.

**"This information may be shared with the sponsors of this Web site or with carefully-screened third parties as necessary for the operation of the Institute for a Healthier Heart."**

About this Site    Privacy Policy    Contact Us

*This example shows why it is worth taking time to read a site's privacy policy. It can help you figure out a website's true purpose and help protect the privacy of your personal information.*

Which site can you trust? Let's review what we now know about each site.

### Evaluating Internet Health Information: Conclusion—Part 1 of 2

The Internet provides you with quick access to health information. But you need to be able to tell the difference between the good sites and the bad.

Let's review the clues to quality by looking at our two fictional websites.

The site for the Physicians Academy for Better Health:

- Is managed by health care experts
- Has a clearly stated purpose to educate the public on disease prevention and healthy living
- Labels advertising
- Reviews health information before posting it
- Explains the sources of data and research
- Is up to date
- Will not share personal information

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*The Physicians Academy for Better Health is an example of a website that clearly labels where you'll find the information you need to decide on the quality of the site.*

The site for the Institute for a Healthier Heart:

- Does not tell you who is managing it
- May have information that favors its sponsor
- Has an unclear purpose, but appears to be about selling products that claim to help your heart
- Does not label advertising
- Does not describe how information is chosen
- Does not identify the sources of information
- Does not tell how old the information is
- May include misinformation
- Might share your personal information with others

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Healthy Living | Shop

Blood Pressure   Cholesterol   Heart Disease   Children & Heart Health

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 Enlarged Waist + Elevated Triglycerides = Heart Stroke Risks for Women  
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Learn how a **revolutionary new drug** can help your heart!

**Join the Institute Now!**

Name:

Email:

Zip Code:

Age:

[Submit](#)

[About this Site](#)   [Privacy Policy](#)   [Contact Us](#)

*The example of the Institute for a Healthier Heart may look like a good site at first. But if you look closer, you won't find the facts you need to evaluate the quality of their information – and that's a big clue that the information may not be reliable.*

Which website will you trust?

### Evaluating Internet Health Information: Conclusion—Part 2 of 2

After comparing two example websites, the Physicians Academy for Better Health website is more likely to be a reliable source of information.

**Physicians Academy for Better Health**

Diseases & Conditions | Diet & Nutrition | Exercise | Medication & Treatment

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*While websites may look professional and trustworthy, you can't know if you can trust the information they provide until you check out the provider and purpose, the quality of the information, and the privacy policy.*

Use this [checklist of questions](#) to ask when browsing health websites or deciding what health information to share on social media.

Asking these questions will help you find quality health information online and avoid sharing misinformation. But there is no guarantee that the information will be perfect.

So, it's a good idea to check several high-quality websites to see if they have similar information. Looking at many good sites will also give you a wider view of a health issue.

But remember that online information is not a substitute for medical advice from your own health care provider. What you learn online may not be right for you.

Always talk with your provider before following any advice that you find online.

Patient/provider partnerships lead to the best decisions for your health.

To learn more about finding good health information, visit the MedlinePlus page on [Evaluating Health Information](#). It tells you what types of websites are generally trustworthy. It also includes tips for evaluating health stories in the news and books about health.

This resource is provided to you by the National Library of Medicine. If you have your own website, we invite you to link to this tutorial.