

# 101 PATIENT

How to Find  
Reliable Health  
Information



***Joint Commission***  
RESOURCES

# Super Web Sites for Health Research

You've just been told you have diverticulitis. "Diver-what?" you ask yourself. Being a creature of technology, you head home, flip on your pc, and type in this foreign sounding word. What comes up is a mish-mash of information, some of which is from a pharmaceutical company that sells medication to treat (surprise!) diverticulitis, some of which is just plain wrong or scary, and some of which is truly impossible to understand since it's written for doctors.

There are probably hundreds of excellent Web sites you can use to learn about your specific condition or health topics in general, but here's a manageable list (and many are available in Spanish). It's best not to rely on any one site; instead you should seek out multiple sources to gain the best perspective. Also, check to make sure the posted information is timely and not more than two years old. Steer clear of anonymous chat rooms or message boards.

These sites were picked based on recommendations from The Medical Library Association and the government's Department of Health and Human Services. Although these Web sites are reliable, and in many cases meet the highest standards of peer-reviewed, science-based information, always check with your doctor before making any health care decisions based on something you read online.

# General Health Information

**healthfinder**<sup>®</sup> – Available in Spanish

Visit: <http://www.healthfinder.gov>

Developed by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, healthfinder is a consumer-friendly search engine linking carefully selected information from more than 1,500 health-related organizations. While its A-Z health topics library may be a draw, the site also provides a directory of doctors, dentists, and hospitals.

Search Tip

Consider clicking the “Just for You” section, an area tailored to the specific needs of various audiences based on sex, race, and occupation, among others.

## HealthWeb

Visit: <http://www.healthweb.org>

HealthWeb is a collaborative project of health science libraries providing hundreds of health, disease, and reference links. A straightforward site with fairly broad categories, HealthWeb may be a good choice for beginners as it links users to reputable specialty organizations and full-text articles without much hassle.

Search Tip

For a quicker, more effective search, consider clicking on the category links rather than using the search engine.

## Mayo Clinic

Visit: <http://www.mayoclinic.com>

With both medical experts and Web publishers working to bring you up-to-date health-related information, the Mayo Clinic is a great starting point for research. The patient-centered site provides everything from disease and condition listings to treatment decision assistance, drug information, and healthy living tips.



For general information, consider category links on the site's homepage. For specific topics, it's more helpful to use Mayo Clinic's sophisticated search engine.

## National Library of Medicine

Visit: <http://www.nlm.nih.gov>

Includes links to health-related sites, resources, and databases that you can use to research health conditions and diseases.



To view the consumer-friendly version of this site, locate the "Especially for" category and select "The Public." If you're having trouble with your search, consider the "NLM Guide to Finding Health Information" link.

## New York Online Access to Health

– Available in Spanish

Visit:

<http://www.noah-health.org>

This site was developed by four New York library associations to provide accessible health information to the public. Catering to the Spanish-speaking community, the site offers a split screen for a bilingual listing of health topics, an index of conditions and health issues, and a search engine.



Consider the “Index A-Z” for a more structured, easy-to-follow search.

## NIH Health Info Page

Visit:

<http://www.health.nih.gov>

As the nation’s medical research agency, the National Institutes of Health provides a consumer-friendly Web site designed as a good starting point to learn about a wide range of diseases. While the site provides a general overview on hundreds of health subjects, it also offers special sections on particular health topics for children, minorities, men, women, and seniors.



Choose the “Health Topics A-Z” link if you know the specific disease or condition you’re searching for. For general information, or to help narrow your search, consider the “Browse Categories” link.

# Advanced Search

## Combined Health Information Database

Visit:

<http://chid.nih.gov>

The Combined Health Information Database includes titles, abstracts, and links to locate health information and health education resources with both simple and detailed search options.



If looking for a specific topic, consider clicking the “simple search” option link and entering a search term under the “all CHID databases” option. You can also go directly to “Topics.”

# Video Option

## The Health Library at Stanford Streaming Video Collection

Visit:

[http://www.med.stanford.edu/  
healthlibrary/resources/videos.html](http://www.med.stanford.edu/healthlibrary/resources/videos.html)

If you're tired of reading lists or articles, the Health Library at Stanford offers a Streaming Video Collection covering a variety of health-related lectures, classes, and other health-related presentations available online through audio and video.



Look to the "Real Video Selections" listing for an overview of video categories. To view the videos, you need RealPlayer® software. If you don't have the application, just click on the link to download it.

# Finding Doctors and Hospitals

## American Medical Association

Visit: <http://www.ama-assn.org>

The American Medical Association's Web site includes stories about medical issues in the news and lets you search for doctors by name or medical specialty.



For up-to-date health-related news, select "Newsroom" and its subheading "Headline News." To locate doctors, click the "DoctorFinder" link on the top right.

## Family Doctor – *Some articles available in Spanish*

Visit: <http://www.familydoctor.org>

This site, sponsored by the American Association of Family Physicians (AAFP), includes more than 200 clinically reviewed articles on health topics for men, women, and children. You can even search by your symptoms. You can also search for physicians who are members of AAFP by zip code.



To locate an AAFP doctor in your area, use the "Health Tools" heading and click on the "Find a Doctor" link.



## Medline Plus – Available in Spanish

Visit: <http://www.medlineplus.gov>

While it's known for its extensive medical encyclopedia, the U.S. National Library of Medicine and the National Institutes of Health's Medline Plus is also an extensive resource for finding doctors, dentists, health care facilities, and services.

### Search Tip

To locate a health care professional, facility, or service, click on the "Directories" bullet, then choose from the additional links provided. For an easier search, choose from the links at the top of the page.

## Quality Check®

Visit: <http://www.qualitycheck.org>

This resource, created by the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations, lets you locate and compare Joint Commission–accredited organizations. Quality Check tells you how various accredited hospitals and nursing homes, for example, rate within a range of patient care, from treating addiction to offering vocational rehabilitation. The site also offers visitors the opportunity to view an organization's Quality Report, which determines how the organization rates on medical errors, and quality of care, among many other topics.

### Search Tip

To get the most out of the Quality Check search engine, consider choosing the "virtual tour" option. The virtual tour requires the Macromedia® Flash® Player application (which can be downloaded by clicking "Flash" next to the tour link if you don't have it).

# Diseases and Conditions

## Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality

– Some articles available in Spanish

Visit:

<http://www.ahrq.gov>

The Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, a branch of the U.S Department of Health and Human Services dedicated to advancing excellence in health care, offers a Web site with quality, full-text information that you don't have to link through a bunch of sites to read.

Search Tip

Click on the “Consumers & Patients” icon to get started.

## American Heart Association

– Available in Spanish

Visit:

<http://www.americanheart.org>

The American Heart Association Web site is informative and easy-to-navigate, developed with the consumer in mind. Although much of the site is devoted to disease prevention, there is a lengthy index on heart diseases and conditions as well as full-text articles and government statistics on both adults and children.

Search Tip

While a well-constructed feature article is the homepage attention-getter, look to the links on the left for a breakdown of the site's content.

## CDC Health Topics

Visit: <http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/diseases>

This section of the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) Web site includes the exhaustive list of infectious diseases which the CDC studies.



Can't remember the name of the disease you're looking for or how to spell it? Try checking the "Popular Topics" sidebar or peruse the alphabetical index to jog your memory. For additional search help, there is a "Using this Index" sidebar that can help you tailor the search terms.

## National Cancer Institute

– Available in Spanish

Visit: <http://www.cancer.gov>

As its many Web site awards attest, The National Cancer Institute Web site is a one-stop-shop for all things cancer-related, a small portion of which include a list of many types of cancer and topics including treatment, prevention, and coping techniques. For searchers interested in the future of cancer care, the site also includes information about ongoing clinical trials.



Don't be put off by the official sounding name of this site. This is an easy-to-understand site for consumers. Just scroll down the organized list of topics that pop up and see where your interests lie.

# Specific Audiences

## Administration on Aging

– Available in several languages

Visit:

<http://www.aoa.gov>

This comprehensive site developed by an agency of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services provides up-to-date information relating to the aging population, such as national news, pending and current legislation, common ailments, housing, and outreach programs. The site provides information geared toward family members and their caregivers.



If you're having trouble locating information, consider clicking the "Elders and Families" link for an organized drop-down menu for further guidance.

## National Institute on Aging

– Some articles available in Spanish

Visit:

<http://www.nia.nih.gov>

An institute leading the federal effort on aging issues, the U.S National Institutes of Health-sponsored National Institute of Aging provides a comprehensive site covering age-related news, research programs, clinical trials, and minority issues.



For the most public-friendly area of the site, consider clicking on the "Health Information" link to find various publications, clinical trial information, public service ads, and related links.

## **Kids Health** – *Some articles available in Spanish*

Visit: <http://www.kidshealth.org>

Sponsored by the Nemours Center for Children's Health Media, this site helps parents, teens, and children learn about hundreds of topics relating to children's health.



The site offers a multiple-site option that allows parents, teens, and children to have a site customized to their needs. Once you choose the page you want, the simple headings and featured articles make navigation nearly effortless.

## **Men's Health**

*(American Academy of Family Physicians)*

Visit: <http://www.familydoctor.org/men.xml>

A specialty section of the familydoctor.org site, the Men's Health page provides viewers with information on male-health related issues such as reproduction, addictions, sexually transmitted diseases, and fatherhood.



Have a symptom? Nothing substitutes a doctor's visit, but the site's "Search by Symptom" feature may be an informative starting point.

## National Women's Health Information Center

– Some articles available in Spanish

Visit:

<http://www.4women.gov>

The site, sponsored by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, includes health information geared specifically towards women, such as common diseases, health concerns, pregnancy, and breastfeeding. The information center's site also offers a special section on minority women's health.



Don't let the sparse homepage deceive you – there is much more information than meets the eye at first glance. For starters, considering clicking on the “Health Topics” link.

# Don't Forget These Other Resources!

Even though the Internet is a widely used source of health information, there are many other ways to come by reliable information. Consider these options to learn more about your health:

- **Bookstores.** Look for books that address your condition, or ask your doctor for any titles he or she recommends.
- **Community organizations.** Religious groups, local YMCA/YWCAs, and other community associations may offer support groups or health-related information.
- **Hospitals.** Local hospitals have libraries that are sometimes open to the public. They may also offer free or reasonably priced patient education programs, support groups, and other resources.
- **Libraries.** Your library may offer a wealth of health information, and reference librarians can help you access databases and other sources of medical data.
- **Local health organizations.** Many national organizations have state chapters and local support groups; search on the Internet or look in your local phone book for local resources.

**Note:** The resources referenced here are to guide you to general consumer health information. No direct recommendation or sponsorship by Joint Commission of these Web resources is implied.

# Joint Commission Resources

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**Our Mission** The mission of Joint Commission Resources is to continuously improve the safety and quality of care in the United States and in the international community through the provision of education and consultation services and international accreditation.

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