

Find Reliable Health Information

I hope this book has sparked a greater interest in research. Here are some helpful tips for finding reliable information about health, medicine, or science.

Start at the top of the money trail. People pay taxes to the U.S. government. Then the National Institutes of Health (NIH) provides money to universities, research institutions, and medical centers to pay for specific research.

When research is complete, scientists and researchers write articles about their discoveries. Their articles are submitted to medical or scientific journals. The articles are reviewed by peers who analyze and scrutinize the research.

If an article is approved for publication, a news release may be written. The news release will be approved by the researchers. The news release is published on the website of the university, medical center, or research institute. Also, the news is sent to the NIH for their website. The research will be included in updated articles for consumers on MedlinePlus.gov and the Center for Disease Control.

To make the research known quickly to the public, press releases are sent to news organizations and journalists. Editors review the information and decide whether or not to write an article or produce a news segment about the research. News reports will depend on the importance or timeliness of the research, current trends, and other factors.

Health organizations, associations and foundations use the news releases to inform patients, caregivers, and others.

Companies and corporations use the news releases to inform investors and stimulate interest in new products.

Educators, authors, and public speakers refer to the research in their lessons, presentations, and books. Other people post information about the research on their websites and in blogs or videos.

As the information filters down the line, or as it is recycled, it may contain small or large errors – like those errors that occur when people play the game “telephone.” People whisper a message in another person’s ear, only to learn that the original message was altered a little or a lot.

When you have questions about research – or supposed research –look for a news release or an article. Read the original journal article about the research. For difficult words, use the online dictionary.

Happy hunting!

Research Shortcuts

Here are some shortcuts for online health research:

- Use keywords and National Institutes of Health
- Use keywords and the name of a leading university that does medical research.
- Use keywords and the name of a well-known or established health organization, association, or foundation. For example, the American Cancer Society.
- Use keywords and include “news release” and the current or previous year.
- Use keywords and the names of organizations that distribute press releases, such as ScienceDaily or Newswise.
- Use keywords and include “scholarly articles.” Plan to use the online dictionary to look up new words.
- Use keywords and include the word “abstract.” An abstract is a brief summary of a research article in a journal.

Enjoy learning!