

PhysioBiz

Health newsflashes
for bodies busy moving, working, playing, being.



Trust in me?

Welcome to PhysioBiz, with healthcare advice and information you can trust and rely on, brought to you by the South African Society of Physiotherapy!

That's an important statement, just underneath our headline: it's telling you exactly who is responsible for sharing the information in this newsletter, and giving you an idea of their credibility – the South African Society of Physiotherapists is obviously a national organisation whose members are qualified physiotherapists.

In a world where information is coming at us thick and fast all day long, it's not easy to decide who to trust. And that's especially important when you're making decisions about your health. Most of us are what they call 'e-patients' these days, at least occasionally, trawling the net for information and solutions to health problems. But if you don't consume information with caution, you could end up making very bad and even dangerous decisions.

The South African Society of Physiotherapy has some helpful tips:

Who's speaking?

Who is the provider of the information? Any solid, trustworthy website will have an **'about' tab** that tells you who the organisation, company or person behind the site is, usually along with an expression of their mission or purpose, their contact details and often some idea of how the website is funded – by government funding or grants from philanthropic organisations, for instance.

Any article should be attributed to **an author**, and it should be easy to find a biography – even a paragraph – of the person. This is where you'll learn whether the writer is a medical doctor, a science journalist or researcher, and why they have an interest in the topic. (The author may not be a professional. Sometimes, for example, knowledgeable patients blog about conditions they have had to learn inside out, because they are personally affected, and this will come through in the bio.)

Are the **credentials of the writer** appropriate to the topic? If the topic is knee injuries, for example, you can be confident that a physiotherapist, who has studied the moving and living body intensively for four years at university and have worked

with many patients with knee injuries, knows the terrain and the research well – but perhaps you might not repose quite as much trust in, say, a dietician writing on this topic.

Is this **original info** created by the website? Or have they drawn it from another source? If so, that should be very clear.

When?

Be a little wary of **undated information**. The info in an article published ten years ago might be outdated by the time you read it. If a website also shows you when an article was reviewed and by whom, that's ideal – for example, health websites might say “Reviewed on 9 September 2017 by paediatrician Dr XYZ”.

What's in it?

You will naturally **steer clear of obvious sales pitches**, with lots of capital letters and multiple exclamation marks. But always scan more subtle information for signs that the providers have some interest in selling you things or promoting something – not just products like supplements, but books, access to videos and the like.

Be wary of **extreme and all-embracing claims**: “The only way to lose weight permanently!” or “This is the secret to conquering cancer!” or “The one thing you need to know to prevent Alzheimer's disease, allergies, asthma...” and so on right through the alphabet. (All-embracing claims like this are often made by ideologues. They may not, in fact, be selling anything; they may be true believers who earnestly want everyone to know that humanity's health woes all come from exposure to a certain chemical, or a certain source of pollution or a common medical procedure. There is often very little real validity or underlying credible research to support their claims.)

If a site is full of **patient testimonials**, be cautious. These are often compelling stories, but you want them served up with two other things, at least: some kind of underlying scientifically plausible mechanism that explains the cures/solutions, and a solid, well-written explanation that translates the science into ordinary layperson's language.

Look for **references or links to references**. Assess the value of the references: if the author relies on a single source for info or if he or she only references other articles by bloggers or journalists, you might want to dig a bit further to check the validity of the info. Links to original research are top prize when health is the subject matter.

And get a **second opinion**. It's never been easier to find other voices; check to see if other credible health authorities are saying the same or similar things.

Who else?

What kind of links does the site include? Generous links to many **credible sites** are helpful – for example, info about knee injuries is more likely to be solid, if it links you to the SASP's website (www.saphysio.co.za) and those of other physiotherapy organisations, as well as the Global Alliance for Musculoskeletal Health and similar.