

5-4 Finding Reputable Evidence-based Resources

Information is everywhere

In today's world, information is available 24/7 to anyone with a smart phone – which is just about everyone. It is an instinct to believe what we see on TV or social media. And if it is interesting, we want to share it with other people. Within hours an interesting story, photo or video can go viral and be seen by millions of people. And the more we hear it, the more likely we are to think it is true. In fact, people are more likely to search for health and nutrition information from the internet than talk to a health professional.



That means that you are likely to hear all kinds of things from participants during nutrition-focused counseling. As a certifier, your job is to sort out which information is based on reliable research and which information is inaccurate, designed to grab headlines, or is trying to sell a product.

WIC uses evidence-based practice for nutrition-focused counseling

As a WIC certifier you will apply evidence-based practice to your nutrition-focused counseling. Evidence-based practice is an approach to medicine, education, and other

disciplines that emphasizes the practical application of the findings of the best available current research.

That means that we look at the most current research and relate those conclusions to what our experience as a certifier tells us, and then frame that information so it applies to what our participants think is most important. Where those 3 things intersect is the information we share with participants.



Considerations:

- Talk to the WIC nutritionist in your agency to make sure the information you provide is accurate.
- We learn new things from research all the time, and recommendations may change over time. But we want to make sure we only share information that is the result of high quality research and has been accepted by experts in the field.
- When you hear something new, whether from a participant or the internet, you will want to use critical thinking to tell the difference between internet hype, personal opinion and research-based information.
- The internet is a valuable tool as long as you know how to tell what information is based on research and is evidence-based.

About the internet

When thinking about the internet, just remember:

- No one is in charge of the internet;
- In the United States, there are few rules and regulations overseeing what can be posted;
- Anyone can build a website;
- No educational or professional qualifications are necessary to post something on the web;



Therefore, you cannot automatically trust information found on the web.¹

How can I tell if a website is credible?

It can be challenging to determine whether a website you're using is credible, but there are a few things to look for.

¹ From Internet Power Searching: the advance manual, Phil Bradley, Neal Schuman Publishers

Remember the **ABC**S of evaluating websites.

Accuracy

- Does the site provide references to scientific literature? (Popular media such as Facebook, Instagram, or YouTube don't count)
- Credible websites, like books and scholarly articles, should cite the source of the information presented.



Authority

- Is the information from a credible source? Are they a health professional?
 - Check the About Us section
 - Information on the internet with a listed author is one indication of a credible site. The fact that the author is willing to stand behind the information presented (and in some cases, include his or her contact information) is a good indication that the information is reliable
- Does the site encourage conversations with medical professionals?

Bias

- Who pays for the site? Are ads or sponsored content clearly labeled?
- Does the site use sensational language, make health promises, or offer special deals?
- Check the site's domain (.com, .org, .net, .edu, .gov)
 - Some domains such as .com, .org, and .net can be purchased and used by any individual. However, the domain .edu is reserved for colleges and universities, while .gov denotes a government website. These two are usually credible sources for information (though occasionally a university will assign a .edu address to each of its students for personal use, in which case use caution when citing).
 - Be careful with the domain .org, because .org is often used by organizations which may have an agenda of persuasion rather than education.

Comprehension

- Is the information easy to understand?
- Is the site easy to navigate? This can be very subjective, but a well-designed site can be an indication of more reliable information. Good design helps make information more easily accessible.
- Poor spelling and grammar are an indication that the site may not be credible. To make the information presented easy to understand, credible sites watch writing style closely.

Current

- Are there dates on the material? Is the material recent, e.g. under 5 years old?
- The date of any research information is important, including information found on the Internet. By including a date, the website allows readers to make decisions about whether that information is recent enough for their purposes.

Of course, there may be some reliable websites that do not include all these qualities. If you are unsure whether the site you're using is credible, verify the information you find there with another source you know to be reliable.

Learning activity



Sometimes sites like WebMD.com have some reliable information but their main goal is not to educate the user but to generate money. The only goal of MedlinePlus.gov is to provide accurate information. Compare the 2 sites using the **ABCs**.

ABC's	WebMD.com	MedlinePlus.gov
Accuracy		
Authority		
Bias		
Comprehension		
Current		

Learning activity



Sometimes you will be asked about the validity of a health claim or concern that a participant has seen in the news. Use this handout to evaluate a health claim or concern you have heard recently.

<https://www.ag.ndsu.edu/publications/food-nutrition/finding-the-truth-i-reliable-nutrition-and-health-information/fn569.pdf>

After using the critical thinking questions in the handout, what do you think of the health claim?

Talk it over



Talk with your training supervisor about what resources are used in your clinic to evaluate health and nutrition materials.

References



Trusted websites for health and nutrition information

- [Healthfinder.gov](https://www.healthfinder.gov) from US Dept. of Health and Human Services
- [Eatright.org](https://www.eatright.org) from Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics
- [Breastfeeding](https://www.cdc.gov/breastfeeding/) (<https://www.cdc.gov/breastfeeding/>) from Centers for Disease Control (CDC)
- [Division of Nutrition, Physical Activity and Obesity](https://www.cdc.gov/nutrition/) from Centers for Disease Control (CDC)
- [Medline Plus](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/) from U.S. National Library of Medicine
- [The Nutrition Source](https://www.harvard.edu/nutrition/) from Harvard
- [Kids Health](https://www.kidshealth.org/) from Nemours with articles in English/Spanish/Audio translations.