

# Using the Internet for Cancer Information and Support



This Information Sheet will give you an overview of the internet and how to use it to acquire information on cancer.

Facing a diagnosis of cancer can be frightening and confusing. Gathering information about your cancer, its treatment and the services available can be a helpful strategy.

Information can help to:

- reduce anxiety
- enable you to ask the right questions thus making the most of your consultation with your doctor or your nurse
- assist in decision-making about treatment
- help you feel a sense of control over what is happening.

Your cancer care team will provide a lot of information but you may wish to explore your topic in greater depth. The internet can be a useful way of easily and quickly accessing cancer information.

## The internet

Put simply, the internet is an interconnected global network of computers with information available 24 hours a day. This consists of websites which are places on the internet where people or organisations have put information. Each website has its own unique address. Websites can range in size and scope from, for example, one person's personal experiences with just a few documents on it, through to large sites with a huge range of documents. You can use the internet to search for information or use the interactive options of mailing lists or chat-rooms to talk to others.

Anyone, anywhere can put whatever they choose on their website, so ensure that you have the material you find is checked for accuracy, and is relevant to your situation.

## Getting started on the internet

If you have not got a home computer you may be able to use a computer at your local library, Cancer Society, or a friend's.

You need a computer, a modem (the modem on your computer hooks up to your telephone line and shuttles information back and forth from the internet to your computer). An internet service provider is a company that provides the telephone numbers with which your modem dials to connect to the internet. You will also need a telephone to access the internet at home. Alternatively, ask the Cancer Information Service to obtain information for you.

Call **0800 CANCER (226 237)** for help with finding information on the internet.

## Searching (Finding information on the internet)

It is helpful to be mindful of the following when conducting a search on the Internet:

- your diagnosis is unique and general information will nearly always need to be modified for you. You may wish to talk through the information you find with your doctor or other health care professional.
- be aware that some sites are most interested in marketing products and some may make claims to cure cancer using their products. Beware of this before sending credit card or other personal details over the internet.

- search for information at a time when you are prepared for it, and are able to talk it through with others.
- keep a pen and paper handy to note down questions or concerns.

### Search tips

- Use a search engine, eg. Google, Yahoo, enter keywords or a phrase and sift through the results.
- Performing the same search on different search engines can yield quite different results.
- Try narrowing down the topic to get more specific information, e.g. not just breast cancer but rather breast cancer and chemotherapy, or bowel and cancer survivor.
- get recommendations for reliable websites from the Cancer Society or your health care team.
- check new sites you visit against the FDA (U.S. Food and Drug Administration) suggested criteria for reliable sites (U.S. Food and Drug Administration website address: [www.fda.gov/](http://www.fda.gov/)).
- Government or university run sites without marketing, social or political agendas are good sources for scientific and medical information.
- The site may link to other sources of medical information.
- The site should be updated on a regular basis.

From “*Cancer Resources on the Internet*”  
Wood M S & Delozier E P, Editors.  
The Henworth Press Inc, New York, 1997.

### Mailing Lists

These are email (electronic mail) based support, information and discussion groups, accessible 24 hours a day. There are many such groups for people with cancer, mostly set up by those interested in a specific cancer, e.g. breast or prostate. There are groups for those having specific treatments, e.g. bone-marrow transplant. Participants in these groups are people with cancer, caregivers, interested parties and health care professionals.

### Newsgroups

These operate like a bulletin board and don't require users to subscribe to them. Instead, users can browse messages without having to contend with the enormous amount of mail that is generated by mailing lists.

### Chat rooms

These are emails conversations taking place at an agreed time. What one person types immediately appears on another's computer screen thus allowing instant feedback to readers. These groups are sometimes referred to as 'chat rooms'.

### Finding Addresses for Information and Support

We recommend that you contact the Cancer Society Information Service by calling **0800 CANCER (226 237)** for suggestions of websites to visit.