

## Using the Internet for Cancer Information and Support



This Information Sheet gives you an overview on the internet and how to use it to find accurate information on cancer.

Gathering information about your cancer, its treatment, and the services available can be helpful. Information can:

- reduce anxiety.
- enable you to ask questions of your doctor or nurse, so that you can make the most of your appointments.
- assist in decision-making about treatment.
- help you feel a sense of control over what is happening.

Your cancer care team will provide you with information but you may wish to explore for yourself. The internet has made it easier and faster to find health information. Much of this information is valuable; however, the internet also allows rapid and widespread distribution of false and misleading information. It is important to carefully consider the source of information you find, and to discuss the information with your health care team.

### The internet

The internet is an interconnected global network of computers with information available 24 hours a day. Websites 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 one person's personal experiences through to large sites with a huge range of information. You can use the internet to search for information or use the interactive options of mailing lists or chat rooms to talk to others.

### Getting started on the internet

If you do not have a home computer you may be able to access a computer at your local library, the Cancer Society, or from a friend.

You need a computer and a way to access the internet—this may be by using 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) or a wi-fi connection that allows you to connect without interfering with your telephone connection. If you do not have a connection at home then many public places offer free wi-fi, enabling you to connect in a library or café. An internet service provider is a company that provides the connection to the internet. Alternatively, ask the nurses at the Cancer Information Service to find 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 think about the following when searching the internet:

- The information you find on the internet will be a general overview of your type of cancer. It is important to remember that the details of your treatment may not be exactly the same.
- 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

- Enter key words or a phrase into a search engine, such as Google, and sift through the results.
- Try narrowing down the topic to get more specific information, for example, 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.

## Things to check to find a good website:

- Try to use sites that are updated regularly and come from a qualified author or trusted organisation. These will normally link you to other reliable sites.
- Generally, cancer-related websites that have a **.gov**, **.edu** or **.org** ending, and have evidence-based information that can be trusted.
  - Sites with a **.gov** ending are produced by a recognised government department.
  - Sites with a **.edu** ending are from educational institutions.
  - Sites with a **.org** ending are usually independent organisations like the Cancer Society.
  - New Zealand specific sites will end in **.nz**.
  - Sites ending in **.com** or **.net** may provide good information, however, they usually have a commercial link.
- a good website provides a contact address and a home page clearly stating who they are and their background.
- Be cautious of websites that are selling products. The accuracy of their health information may be influenced by their desire to sell a product.

If you have any doubts, discuss them with your health care team or the information nurses at the Cancer Helpline 0800 CANCER (226 237).

## Social networking

Many organisations now use social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter to give the most up-to-date information, as well as interacting with the general public. The links to these sites are usually found from the organisation's main website.

## Internet forum/message board

An **internet forum** or **message board** is an online discussion site where people can hold conversations by posting messages. Depending on the forum set-up, a posted message might need to be approved by a moderator before it becomes visible.

Cancer Chat NZ ([www.cancerchatnz.org.nz](http://www.cancerchatnz.org.nz)) is an example of an internet forum, and is moderated by the Cancer Society's cancer information nurses.

## Online Support Groups

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

Some groups have a health professional who supports and advises the group (known as a facilitator) while some support groups are informal and are not facilitated.

## 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 comes from mailing lists.

## Chat rooms

These are email conversations taking place at an agreed time. What one person types immediately appears on another's computer screen, allowing instant feedback to readers.

These groups are sometimes referred to as 'chat rooms'.

## Recommended websites

There is a large amount of useful information on the internet. However, when doing your research, you should be aware that all information placed on the internet is unregulated.

Listed below are recommended cancer specific websites. The information contained in these websites, other than the Cancer Society's, does not necessarily reflect the opinion of the Cancer Society of New Zealand. Effort has been made to ensure that the websites are trustworthy. However, the Cancer Society of New Zealand and its advisers cannot accept liability in relation to this information. We also wish to advise that these websites may be protected by copyright and may not be reproduced without written permission of the authors.

Cancer Society of New Zealand [www.cancernz.org.nz](http://www.cancernz.org.nz)

Cancer Council Victoria [www.cancervic.org.au](http://www.cancervic.org.au)

Cancer Council New South Wales  
[www.cancerCouncil.com.au](http://www.cancerCouncil.com.au)

CancerHelp UK [www.cancerhelp.org.uk](http://www.cancerhelp.org.uk)

Macmillan Cancer Support [www.macmillan.org.uk](http://www.macmillan.org.uk)

American Cancer Society [www.cancer.org](http://www.cancer.org)

National Cancer Institute [www.cancer.gov](http://www.cancer.gov)

For more good websites, we recommend that you contact the information nurses at the Cancer Society Information Helpline by calling 0800 CANCER (226 237).