



# BetterSafe

WELCOA'S ONLINE BULLETIN FOR YOUR FAMILY'S SAFETY

## GETTING SAFE & RELIABLE HEALTH INFO



People love exchanging health information. More than half of adults nationwide say they turn to friends or family for health information or support when facing a serious health issue. People also share health information within their communities—at school, work, places of worship, and various events.

The quality of the health information you get depends on the source. “When looking online for health information, it’s a good idea to start with reputable websites, such as government websites,” says National Institutes of Health’s (NIH) Stephanie Dailey, who specializes in sharing health information with older adults. “Government agencies have well-researched information that’s been vetted by expert scientists and doctors.”

“Students and others can be drawn to websites with quirky or ‘amazing’ health stories that may be inaccurate,” says Timothy Keady, who heads the student wellness center at the Rochester Institute of Technology in New York. “We always try to steer them back toward more appropriate health information that’s based on science. We know that information from NIH, the CDC, and other agencies is going to be accurate.”

No matter where you gather and read health information, it’s a good idea to discuss what you’ve found with your health care provider. Your provider can help you understand and interpret what you’ve found.

“Being well informed about a condition can be helpful when you visit your doctor,” Dailey says. “You may wish to print out some of the information you find to share with your doctor during your appointment.”

### Spotting Spotty Websites and Claims

How can you tell if websites are hawking a hot new product, old-fashioned snake oil, or something in between? These signs can help you determine whether a website or an ad is on the up-and-up.

*Next Page*  
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WELCOA'S ONLINE BULLETIN FOR YOUR FAMILY'S SAFETY

*Continued from previous page*

- No one treatment works for everybody. All conditions are different. Two people with the same diagnosis may need different treatments. Be skeptical of any website with ads for products that claim to treat any condition.
- “Natural” doesn’t necessarily mean safe or effective.
- Bogus marketers often use trickery and vague language to take advantage of people. Testimonials on websites with ads for products that claim to cure or treat conditions can seem honest and heart-felt, but they can be completely false. In fact, they may not disclose that actors or models have been paid to endorse the product. Even when testimonials come from people who have taken the product, personal stories are not reliable as evidence of effectiveness
- Lots of technical jargon may sound impressive, but by itself, doesn’t prove effectiveness. Big words from a medical dictionary are no substitute for plain-language facts from your doctor.

- A money-back guarantee doesn’t prove that a product works. Even if the money-back guarantee is legitimate, it isn’t a reliable substitute for scientific evidence that a treatment is safe or effective.

Use this checklist to decide if the health information you’re reading online can be trusted:

- ✓ **Who runs the website?** Federal agencies, medical schools, and large professional or nonprofit organizations are often reliable sources of health information.
- ✓ **Who is sponsoring the website?** Be wary if it’s not easy to find the sponsor’s contact information or if the website is trying to sell you something.
- ✓ **Is the information current?** Sites should say when the information was posted or last reviewed.
- ✓ **Is your privacy protected?** Be sure you understand the website’s privacy policy. Be cautious about sharing personal information.





# Day In Day Out

WELCOA'S ONLINE BULLETIN FOR YOUR LIFESTYLE

## Things to Know When Selecting a Complementary Health Practitioner



If you're looking for a complementary health practitioner to help treat a medical problem, it is important to be as careful and thorough in your search as you are when looking for conventional care.

Here are some tips to help you in your search:

- › **If you need names of practitioners in your area, first check with your doctor or other health care provider.** A nearby hospital or medical school, professional organizations, state regulatory agencies or licensing boards, or even your health insurance provider may be helpful.
- › **Find out as much as you can about any potential practitioner, including education, training, licensing, and certifications.** The credentials required for complementary health practitioners vary tremendously from state to state and from discipline to discipline.

Once you have found a possible practitioner, here are some tips about deciding whether he or she is right for you:

- › **Find out whether the practitioner is willing to work together with your conventional health care providers.** For safe, coordinated care, it's important for all of the professionals involved in your health to communicate and cooperate.
- › **Explain all of your health conditions to the practitioner, and find out about the practitioner's training and experience in working with people who have your conditions.** Choose a practitioner who understands how to work with people with your specific needs, even if general well-being is your goal. And, remember that health conditions can affect the safety of complementary approaches; for example, if you have glaucoma, some yoga poses may not be safe for you.

*Next Page*  
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# Day In Day Out

WELCOA'S ONLINE BULLETIN FOR YOUR LIFESTYLE

*Continued from previous page*

- **Don't assume that your health insurance will cover the practitioner's services.** Contact your health insurance provider and ask. Insurance plans differ greatly in what complementary health approaches they cover, and even if they cover a particular approach, restrictions may apply.
- **Tell all your health care providers about all complementary approaches you use and about all practitioners who are treating you.** Keeping your health care providers fully informed helps you to stay in control and effectively manage your health.

## A Word on Credentials

Health care providers' credentials—the licenses, certificates, and diplomas on their office walls—tell us about their professional qualifications to advise and treat us. In the United States, local and state governments and professional organizations establish the credentials that complementary health practitioners need to treat patients. Here are some key points to keep in mind:

- There is no standardized, national system for credentialing complementary health practitioners. State and local governments are responsible for deciding what credentials practitioners must have to work in their jurisdiction.
- The credentials required for complementary health practitioners vary tremendously from state to state and from discipline to discipline.
- Regulations, licenses, or certificates do not guarantee safe, effective treatment from any provider—conventional or complementary.
- Tell all your health care providers about any complementary health approaches you use. Give them a full picture of what you do to manage your health. This will help ensure coordinated and safe care.

Remember that regulations, licenses, or certificates do not guarantee safe, effective treatment from any provider, whether conventional or complementary.



# TakeCharge

WELCOA'S ONLINE SELF-CARE BULLETIN

## Better Check Your Bowels

### Screening for Colon and Rectal Cancer



Colorectal cancer is the second-leading cause of cancer death nationwide. But it can usually be cured when caught early. Screening tests like colonoscopy can save lives by catching problems before symptoms even appear, when treatments might work best.

So no matter how busy you feel, if you're age 50 or older—or even younger if you're at high risk—you should make time to talk with your doctor about getting screened for colorectal cancer.

“Screening is effective, and it's been shown through clinical studies to reduce deaths,” says Dr. Carrie Klabunde, an NIH expert in cancer screening and prevention.

But although screening is known to save lives, many Americans ages 50 and older don't get screened for colorectal cancer. The most common reason, says Klabunde, is that “people don't realize this screening is something they need to do.” Other common reasons include costs and inconvenience, such as taking time off from work.

Colorectal cancer is cancer of the colon or rectum, both of which are part of the large intestine. Scientists don't yet know what causes colorectal cancer, but certain factors affect your risk. Smoking, excess weight, or having 3 or more alcoholic drinks per day raises your risk.

“The risk for colorectal cancer rises with age,” Klabunde adds. Your risk also doubles if you have a close relative who had colorectal cancer.

### Getting Screened

The 3 recommended tests for colorectal cancer are colonoscopy, flexible sigmoidoscopy, or home stool tests. Each test has different benefits and drawbacks. Your health care provider may recommend one or more of these options.

Colonoscopy is the most accurate. The day before the test, you need to drink a special liquid or take prescription pills to cleanse your colon. A doctor inserts a tiny camera attached to a long, thin, flexible tube into the rectum and colon. Any growths the doctor sees, including polyps, can be removed during the procedure. Most polyps are harmless (benign), but some (called adenomas) can become cancer.

Flexible sigmoidoscopy also uses a camera attached to a tube, but the exam looks only at part of the large intestine. To prepare, you'll need to have an enema (an injection of water into the rectum to cleanse the colon) the night before or the day of the procedure. Sigmoidoscopy may let you know if there's a reason to have a colonoscopy.

*Next Page*  
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# TakeCharge

WELCOA'S ONLINE SELF-CARE BULLETIN

*Continued from previous page*

Another option is a home stool test. You can take this test in the privacy of your home using inexpensive or free kits from your doctor's office or pharmacy. After collecting a small sample of your stool, you mail or deliver it to a doctor or lab, where it will be tested for tiny amounts of blood, which could signal a problem.

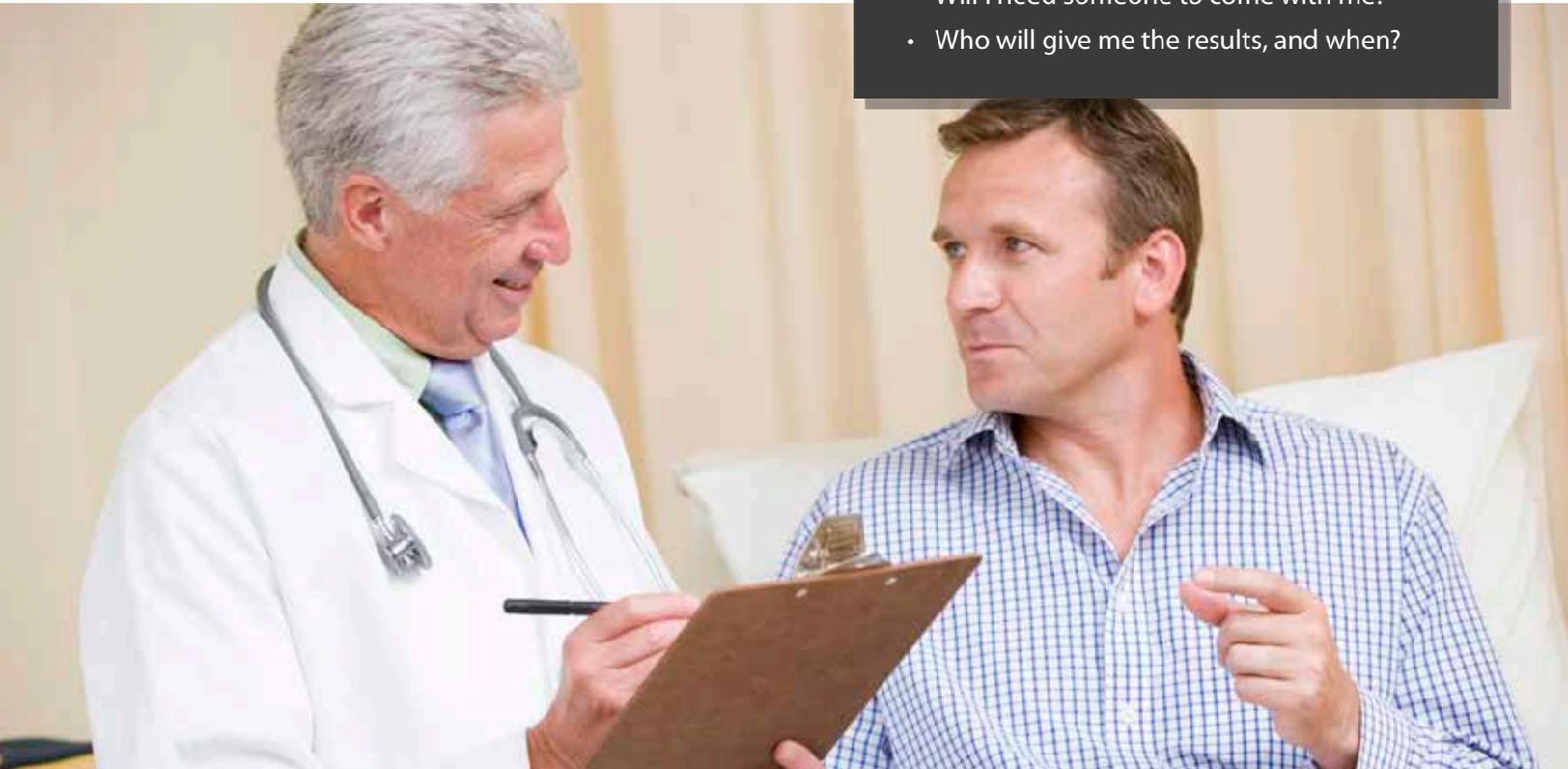
Another screening test, called virtual colonoscopy or CT colonography, can scan the colon from the outside. But its effectiveness is still under study. For more details about different screening options for colorectal cancer, visit [gutcheck.cancer.gov](http://gutcheck.cancer.gov).

Don't wait for symptoms to appear. Talk with a health care provider about when you should begin screening for colorectal cancer and, if so, which test(s) to get. And check with your health insurance company to see if screening costs are covered (they usually are).

## WHAT TO ASK ABOUT COLORECTAL SCREENING

Everyone ages 50 to 75 (and younger people at increased risk) needs to have a plan for colorectal cancer screening. Ask your doctor:

- When should I start getting screened for colorectal cancer?
- Which screening test do you recommend for me?
- How can I prepare for the test?
- What should I expect during the test?
- Are there any risks involved?
- Who will perform the exam?
- Will I need someone to come with me?
- Who will give me the results, and when?





# To Your Health

WELCOA'S ONLINE GENERAL WELLNESS BULLETIN



## Help Others, Help Yourself?

BE A PARTNER IN CLINICAL RESEARCH

Did you know that you can participate in clinical research? Whether you're healthy or sick, young or old, male or female, you're probably eligible to participate in some type of clinical study. Maybe you or a loved one has an illness, and you'd like to help scientists find a treatment or cure. If you're healthy, you can help researchers learn more about how the body works or how sickness can be prevented.

Clinical research, also known as clinical studies or clinical trials, offers hope for many people, because it helps to find better treatments. Clinical trials are at the heart of all medical advances. And volunteer participants are essential to clinical trials.

Clinical research occurs at places such as hospitals, universities, doctors' offices, and community clinics. Studies may be funded by foundations, medical institutions, pharmaceutical companies, and federal agencies.

People with an illness or disease sometimes join a clinical trial to receive

an experimental treatment or to have the additional medical care and attention offered by clinical trial staff. But many participants also say they volunteer to benefit others. "This will be my chance to give back and help other people, maybe even my family in the future," said one NIH clinical trial volunteer who was battling cancer.

Many HIV-infected volunteers who received experimental AIDS drugs more than 2 decades ago went on to survive and thrive, and treatments given to pregnant mothers kept the virus from passing to their newborns. These antiretroviral drugs have since become standard therapy.

A patient volunteer—someone with a known health problem—can help researchers better understand, diagnose, treat, or cure that disease or condition.

But healthy volunteers, who have no known major health problems, also play an important role in clinical research. They help researchers learn things that may indirectly help themselves and

people they know. Healthy volunteers are usually paid for their efforts.

Both types of volunteers are needed, because researchers can learn more about a disease by comparing patient volunteers to healthy volunteers.

### **GUIDELINES & CRITERIA**

All clinical studies have guidelines about who can participate. Patient volunteers may be selected based on the type and stage of a disease, previous treatment history, and other medical conditions. The selection criteria help to ensure that researchers are studying the right people to help find answers to important medical questions.

Clinical researchers often look for people of different ethnicities, races, ages, and sexes.

*Next Page*  
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# To Your Health

WELCOA'S ONLINE GENERAL WELLNESS BULLETIN

*Continued from previous page*

If you're thinking about participating in a clinical trial, members of the research team will talk with you about the details of the study; this is called informed consent. They'll give you a document to sign that includes an overview of the study, such as its purpose, length, procedures, and who to contact for more information.

Members of the research team will also explain the risks and potential benefits of the study. "Volunteers should feel free to ask as many questions as they need to make things clear," says Dr. Christine Grady, an expert in patient protection and bioethics at the NIH Clinical Center. "You can also take the informed consent form home and discuss it with your doctor or somebody else who can help you understand it better."

If you decide to sign the informed consent form, you're still free to withdraw from the study at any time, even after it begins. Informed consent is not a contract; its purpose is to make sure that you know enough about the study to decide whether or not to participate.

Clinical study participants are protected by a group of experts known as an Institutional Review Board (IRB).

"Before the study even starts, clinical research involving humans is almost always reviewed by an IRB," Grady says. "The IRB makes a judgment about whether or not the risks are acceptable and whether the benefits of doing the research justify the risks."

A monitoring team usually also assesses study findings as a clinical trial proceeds. The team stays aware of any potential problems that may arise, and makes sure such issues are addressed.

After a study is completed, clinical researchers carefully examine the information they've collected. The results are often published in scientific journals. If the new approach proves to be safe and effective, it may become standard practice.

There are all kinds of clinical studies. Some evaluate new drugs or new combinations of drugs, new surgical procedures or devices, or new ways to use existing treatments. Others look at certain aspects of care, such as improving the quality of life for people with chronic illnesses.

