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In recent years, the [internet](#) has become the most frequently accessed information source in virtually every area of knowledge and opinion, of fact and conjecture. Unfortunately the accuracy of internet obtained sources is sometimes dubious.

[In a recent Washington Post article by Ariana Cha](#), it was reported that an audit conducted a review of online "Symptom Checkers" for people operated by a wide variety of highly respected groups. The audit found many of these online resources to be less insightful than generally believed. According to Cha's article, the audit was performed by health care policy and medicine researchers Hannah Semigran, Ateev Mehrotra and their co authors at [Harvard Medical School](#). The researchers wrote that, "Our results imply that in many cases symptom checkers can give the user a sense of possible diagnoses but also provide a note of caution, as the tools are frequently wrong and the triage advice overly cautious."

"Symptom checkers provided the correct diagnosis first in only 34 percent of cases, and within the first three diagnoses 51 percent of the time," Cha reported.

What about online veterinary resources?

Similar veterinary sources to those studied here are common. While they can be highly informative, and reputable sites do exist, others may be fraught with misinformation that can adversely impact patients. At the very least, the wrong websites may delay appropriate medical care. It is critical that web based diagnostics be evaluated before being considered valid. Even if you have decided a website is reliable, you should always check with your veterinarian before taking any additional steps.

How can you evaluate a website?

While no website can be a substitute for a [veterinarian](#), the right websites can provide you with valuable information about your pet's health. My search for veterinary related web sites turned up nearly 4 million

results. Some may be conflicting, some may not be current, and some may be erroneous. How do you know if a website is reliable then?

It is important to be a critical consumer of information, just as with products. To make sure a site you are reviewing is correct and integrous, you can start by asking your veterinarian.

One method of evaluating web sites objectively is called the CRAAP test, which stands for Currency, Relevance, Authority, Accuracy and Purpose. [Colorado State University offers a great list of criteria/questions](#) that you should keep in mind as you evaluate a book, article or website.

Many web sites have not been completely reviewed and vetted. Focus your searches on websites developed by professional associations and organizations.

Remember; always rely on your veterinarian first

Never let the internet be a substitute for a dedicated, committed and skilled veterinarian that can actually examine your pet and consider the pet's history. Be sure your veterinarian is involved in any and all medical decisions.

[\[Learn more about safe internet searching here.\]](#)

If you have any questions or concerns, you should always visit or call your veterinarian -- they are your best resource to ensure the health and well-being of your pets.