

Using the internet to search for cancer information and support



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

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

- reduce anxiety and fear
- enable you to ask questions of your doctor or nurse so that you can make the most of your appointments
- help you make decisions about treatment
- help you feel a sense of control over what is happening
- provide support for you, your family/whānau and friends.

Your cancer care team will provide you with information but you may wish to read more for yourself. The internet has made it easier and faster to find health information. While much of it will be valuable, the internet can also have false and misleading information. It is important to consider the source of information you find, and to discuss the information with your health care team.

Getting started on the internet

The internet is a network of computers with information available 24 hours a day. Websites are places on the internet where people or organisations can put their information.

You need a computer, tablet or smartphone device to access the internet. If you do not have a home computer, you may be able to access one at your local library or from a friend. Free Wi-Fi connections are available in many public places such as cafes and restaurants. However, it is important to be cautious when using public Wi-Fi as the connection may not protect your personal information.

If you cannot access the internet, ask the staff at the Cancer Information Helpline to find cancer information for you. Call **0800 CANCER (226 237)**.

Finding cancer information on the internet (searching the internet)

It is helpful to think about the following when searching the internet:

- The information you find on the internet may or may not relate to your cancer. It is important to remember that the details of your individual diagnosis and treatment will not be exactly the same as someone else's.
- Not all cancer tests and treatments on the internet are available in New Zealand.
- Search for information at a time when you are prepared for it, and are able to talk about it with others if necessary.
- Keep a pen and paper handy to note down questions or concerns. These concerns can be raised with your GP, cancer doctor or nurse or with Cancer Society staff on the Cancer Information Helpline **0800 CANCER (226 237)**.

Search tips

- Enter key words or a phrase into a search engine such as Google, and look 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).
- It is important to read information from reliable websites such as those recommended by the Cancer Society or your health care team.

Things to check for when finding a good website:

- Try to use sites that are updated regularly and come from a qualified author or trusted healthcare organisation. These will normally link you to other reliable sites.
- Be aware that information on the internet is sometimes out of date.
- Generally, cancer-related websites that have a .gov, .edu or .org ending 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.
- Be cautious of websites that are selling cancer-related products or services. 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 healthcare team or the information staff at the Cancer Information Helpline **0800 CANCER (226 237)**.
- A good website provides a contact address and a home page clearly stating who they are and their background.

Social media

“Social media” is the name for webpages and applications used for publishing, sharing and talking about information. Social media can include:

- blogs such as Tumblr
- wikis such as Wikipedia
- social networking sites such as Facebook or Twitter
- video sharing sites such as YouTube
- photo sharing sites such as Instagram and Pinterest
- forums and discussion groups (“chat rooms”)
- websites that allow you to post comments.

For more information on being safe on social media, visit Netsafe’s website, www.netsafe.org.nz

Internet forums/message boards

An internet forum or message board is an online discussion site where people can hold conversations by posting messages. Depending on the forum, a posted message might need to be approved by a moderator before it is published for others to see. CancerChatNZ

(www.cancerchatnz.org.nz) is an example of an internet forum, and is moderated by the Cancer Society’s cancer information staff.

Online support groups

These are email (electronic mail)-based support, information, and discussion groups, which are accessible 24 hours a day. There are many 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 healthcare 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 cancer information and support websites

The suggested websites, except for our own, are not maintained by the Cancer Society of New Zealand. We only suggest sites we believe offer credible and responsible information, but we cannot guarantee that the information on such websites is correct, up-to-date or evidence-based medical information.

Cancer Society of New Zealand

www.cancernz.org.nz

Health Navigator NZ

www.healthnavigator.org.nz

Cancer Council Victoria

www.cancervic.org.au

Cancer Council New South Wales

www.cancercouncil.com.au

CancerHelp UK (Cancer Research UK)

www.cancerhelp.org.uk

Macmillan Cancer Support

www.macmillan.org.uk

American Cancer Society

www.cancer.org

National Cancer Institute

www.cancer.gov

National Comprehensive Cancer Network

www.NCCN.org

For more suggestions, we recommend that you contact the information staff at the Cancer Society Information Helpline. Call **0800 CANCER (226 237)**.