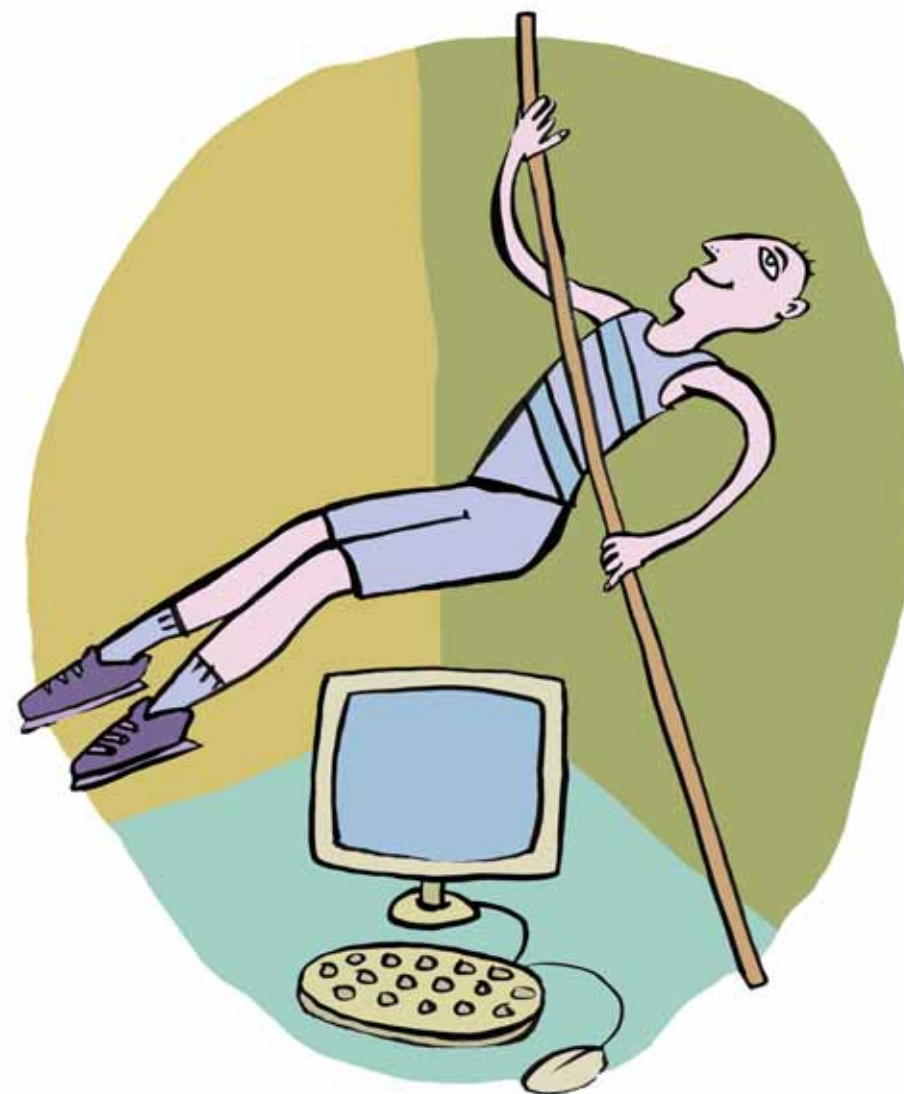


Using the Internet for...

Family health



Using the Internet for **Family health**

by Mary King, Limerick City Library.

Lifesteps offers you a range of online and printed guides. Written by staff from Irish public libraries, each guide contains easy to follow, step by step explanations of how to use the Internet to achieve a specific goal or 'life step'.

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For updates, news on the project and for a full listing of all the guides, log on to www.lifesteps.ie

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Note: words in red appear in the glossary at the end of this module.

Introduction

This guide shows you how to research different aspects of family health on the **Internet**. There are many excellent **websites** available that offer wide and varied information on family health, but the guide will focus on the VHI and Health A to Z sites.

There is a universal requirement for health information. People of all ages are concerned about their health and that of their families, and are aware of the importance of maintaining a healthy lifestyle.

Information on health issues, which previously was available only in health clinics and doctors' surgeries in the form of handouts, booklets and leaflets, is now accessible through the medium of the Internet. More and more people are accessing this information for themselves at home, in libraries etc. Privacy regarding personal queries can be maintained, and information on the most up to date treatments, drugs and research is all there at the click of a **mouse**.

Why use the Internet?

Wide range of material available

The information available on family health and health in general **online** is wide and varied. Information on all aspects of health, from common children's ailments such as colds, measles, and meningitis, to cancer, heart disease, arthritis, etc., can be accessed.

There are many health websites - local, national and international - that are well-designed and easy to **browse**. Many are **category** based, making searching quick and easy.

Note of caution

It is important to check that the information source is accurate and up-to-date. We recommend that you choose websites that comply with procedures as set by governing bodies such as the Irish Medical Association, or The World Health Organization. Some sites, such as Health A to Z, are in compliance with the HONcode (Health on the Net Code). Medically trained and qualified professionals have provided the advice and information given. The HONcode logo is usually displayed at the bottom of such sites.

Disclaimer: Health websites are intended for information purposes only. They are not meant as a substitute for the advice provided by a medical professional. Always consult a doctor or qualified professional if you have personal concerns!

Need to Know

A basic familiarity with the Internet and computers is required. It is a good idea to decide at the outset on the precise scope of the information required from a search. This saves time and focuses the browsing process.

Need to Have

An **email** address is necessary to use such facilities as **'Ask the Doctor Q&A'**, **'Nurse 24/7'**, etc. You can **register** for free e-mail with various providers, such as **Yahoo** mail or **Hotmail**.

A **log-in** name and **password** are required to access some of the medical databases and medical journals. You can register on the site for a log-in name and password.

Related Guides

- **'Internet Basics'** covers the 'Need to Know' requirements for this guide.
- **'The First Two Years'** guide focuses on baby & mother health issues.
- The **'Retirement'** guide covers active retirement for senior citizens.

Quick Guide

The following are the most important steps to researching a specific health topic online:

1. Look for sites that give the information that you require. We suggest **Irish Health** (www.irishhealth.com) or **VHI** (www.vhi.ie). Information/articles reflect **Irish** medical practices, trends and views. Check the **Links** section for similar UK and international websites.
2. If you have the option of selecting a **Category**, do so.
3. If you require more detailed information than that returned by a **category** search, choose the **search for more information** option in the VHI site or **related articles** or **external resources** in the Health A to Z website.
4. Links to other websites and information are listed under the following headings: **Related Topics** and **Useful Resources and Health Websites**.

5. To retrieve and **download** some articles from **medical databases** and **medical journals** you may be required to **register** as a member. The forms are **online** and step by step instructions are given.
6. An **email** address is necessary to avail of some of the **interactive services** such as **discussion boards, queries, nurse 24/7** or **experts' FAQ**.
7. Most **support groups** and **societies** have their own website, eg, 'Meningitis Trust' (www.meningitis-trust.org.uk), 'Alcoholics Anonymous' (www.alcoholicsanonymous.ie), 'Coeliac Society' (www.coeliac.ie), 'Asthma Society' (www.asthmasociety.ie), etc.
8. Remember to read all **disclaimers** and **terms and conditions** carefully.

Step-by-Step Guide

This section focuses on finding information on a particular ailment, its symptoms and treatment. The example used is the childhood infection **measles**.

Step 1: Finding the Right Site

You need to look for sites on the Internet that deal with health issues and in particular family health.

Recommended sites include:

- VHI at <http://www.vhi.ie>
- Irish Health at <http://www.irishhealth.com>
- Health A to Z at <http://www.healthatoz.com>

Step 2: Searching by Category

Search

We will use the VHI website for our search example.

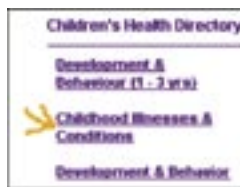
- On the site, click on the category **Health & Lifestyle**.
- On the drop-down menu, under the category **Life Stages**, a new menu is displayed.



- Select **Children**.

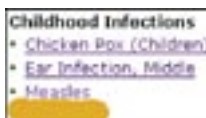


- **Scroll** down the page to **Children's Health Directory**. On this menu select **Childhood Illnesses & Conditions**.
- Next, choose **Childhood Infections**.

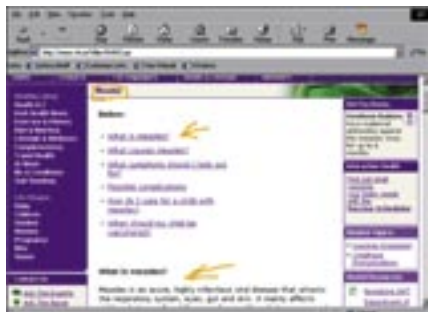


Step 3: Retrieving the Relevant Information

From this list select the chosen topic – **Measles!**



A new **web page** opens, with our chosen topic as a page header. (see below). Underneath is a list of relevant questions on the ailment, its causes, symptoms, complications, etc. Click on each **underlined** question to view the available information.




Step 4: Interactive Health/User Name & Password

The option requires a **log-in name** and **password**, so you must register to access this facility. Just follow the step by step instructions provided to become a user. (Example below.)

 A screenshot of a 'User Login' form. The form has a white background with orange accents. At the top, it says 'User Login'. Below that, there is a paragraph of text: 'This service is available to users who have registered with the site. If you have already created your personal profile please enter your username and password and you will be granted access to the content you were trying to access.' There are two input fields: 'Username' and 'Password'. To the right of these fields is a 'Register Now' button. Below the form, there is a small text link: 'Click here to register your account.'

When you click to register, you are immediately taken to a registration form, where you enter your name, password of your choice and **e-mail** address. Enter your personal details (name, address, date of birth, etc.). If you are a VHI policyholder, your membership policy number must be entered in the appropriate box. To receive information on VHI health products, to be included in research and marketing initiatives, or to receive the e-mail newsletter, just tick the box provided. When the form is filled in click **submit**, to complete the registration.

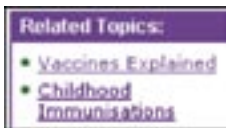
 A screenshot of a registration form. The form has a white background with orange accents. It is divided into two main sections. The first section is titled 'VHI Member or Policyholder?'. It contains a question: 'Are you an existing VHI Healthcare Member?' with 'Yes' and 'No' radio buttons. Below this is a question: 'If Yes, please input your membership number:' followed by three input fields. The second section is titled 'Email Newsletter?'. It contains a question: 'Please check this box if you would like us to send you information on VHI healthcare products or be included in future research & marketing initiatives.' with a checked checkbox. Below this is another question: 'Would you like to receive our weekly personalised email newsletter?' with 'Yes' and 'No' radio buttons. At the bottom right of the form is a 'Submit' button. There is also a 'Password Note' section on the right side of the form: 'Please input a form which we will use to remind you of your password incase you forget it.'



Once your **profile** has been created, you are now free to access the **Interactive Health** option.

Note: Remember your **user name** and secret password, as you will need both of these to log-in in future!

- **Related topics:** This option provides links to topics related to the original search topic, in this case measles. Vaccinations are explained and information on childhood immunisations is provided.



- **Useful resources:** This option provides such facilities as:
 1. NurseLine 24/7 (as before, you must be a VHI policyholder to avail of this service).

You can contact a nurse 24 hours per day

- on CallSave 1850 24 77 24,
- by e-mail (queries may be e-mailed to the address provided) or
- you may use Call Me Back to request a health professional from the Nurseline to call you back at a time convenient to you.

Note: This service provides access to **general, non-diagnostic** health information!

2. Links to other websites: in this case *Department of Health and Children* at www.doh.ie,
3. Printer- friendly version of all information is available if required by the user.



Step 5: Email & Bulletin Boards



An e-mail address is necessary to use some of the interactive services, such as the **Discussion Board** on the VHI website. These bulletin boards give you the opportunity to share knowledge, experience and queries with others **online**.



- To chat about issues with a particular group on the Discussion Board, just click on the 'Join the discussion' or 'Chat with others' option under each category.
- You can choose to **post a new topic**, **search** for a particular topic or get an **overview** of all comments and queries posted by other users.



- The **Post New Topic** form requires your name, e-mail and topic for discussion. If you want to be notified of replies, tick the appropriate box. Type your message in the space provided and click **post**. You will be notified if your topic has been accepted for posting.

Step 6: Support Groups/Societies

- A lot of support groups, societies, and hospitals have their own website. For a list of some organisations and societies' websites, please see our web site www.lifesteps.ie

Step 7: Disclaimers/Terms and Conditions

Disclaimer: All health and medical related websites carry a disclaimer similar to the following: *"The site and its health-related information and resources are not intended to be a substitute for professional medical advice or for the care that patients receive from their doctors. Nothing in this site, or the links accessible through it, is intended to be used for medical diagnosis or treatment and information contained on this site should not be relied on for that purpose."*

As with any service, it is highly recommended that the user of a website reads the terms and conditions of use.

Note: Access to the VHI site is provided on the understanding that the user has read the terms and conditions.

Worked Example: Researching Alzheimer's Disease

This section adds another example to the online family health guide. In this case, researching Alzheimer's Disease from the 'Health A to Z' website.

Note: While this example involves using an international site for our search, the basic steps are the same as searching a local site.

Searching the site

Remember; choose the category option if available!



The most relevant part of this site is the **'Consumer Health Site'** option at bottom left. Click here to take you to the next page and select diseases and conditions. From the drop down menu, choose **conditions a-z, neurological** and finally **Alzheimer's**.

Retrieving the information

The resulting information on the disease is listed under different headings. Click the heading of interest to you, e.g. *"Diagnosing Alzheimer's"*.



Other Options

In addition to general information on Alzheimer's Disease, there are other information resources available to the researcher, such as medical databases, medical journals (www.thelancet.com), societies and organisations (<http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus>) and message boards.



Register as a Member

Just as with the VHI website, there is the option to register for free membership.

Terms and Conditions/Disclaimers

It is recommended that all users of the website read the terms and conditions carefully.

The Health A to Z website disclaimer is as follows:

Disclaimer: The text presented on these pages is for your information only. It is not a substitute for professional medical advice. It may not represent your true individual medical situation. Do not use this information to diagnose or treat a health problem or disease without consulting a qualified healthcare provider. Please consult your healthcare provider if you have any questions or concerns.

Glossary

- Browse:** This is another way to find what you are looking for online. Browsing a website is like browsing in a shop – you look at what is displayed, and see if it fits your requirements. Browsing does not require that you can describe what you are looking for. Instead, you take advantage of the layout of the website to find what you are looking for. Websites may use categories, headings and site maps to help you to browse successfully.
- Copyright:** The legal obligation to obtain permission to reproduce text, music or images.
- Disclaimer:** A denial of responsibility for a thing or act. In the context of this document on 'Family Health' it means that the text presented on these pages is for information purposes only. It is not to be used to diagnose or treat a health problem or disease without first consulting a doctor or medical professional.
- Download:** The process of copying a computer file from the Internet onto your own PC is called downloading. A file such as a music (MP3) file or a document is made available to the Internet by storing it on a server. To download the file, you usually click on a link to it, or else right-click and choose 'save target as' (in Internet Explorer) or 'save link as' (Mozilla Firefox). A box pops up asking you where on your hard disk you want to store the file. You choose the location for storage, click the button and the file is copied onto your hard disk (or downloaded).
- Email:** **(Electronic Mail)**
Email or electronic mail is a service that sends messages across the Internet from one human user to another. Like a letter, email is person-to-person and it stores messages until they are read.
- FAQ:** **(Frequently Asked Questions)**
A FAQ is a list of questions and their answers, which are commonly asked. These are published on the website of a product or service, so that the same question is not

asked of the supplier, over and over again. A good example of a FAQ, which focuses on web security, is at <http://www.w3.org/Security/Faq/www-security-faq.html>

- Hotmail:** A popular e-mail service, which can be accessed from any computer via the web.
- Interactive services:** (e.g. Discussion Boards, Nurse 24/7)
Services that the user can respond to or change.
- Internet:** A large collection of computers, connected together to allow them to share information with one another.
- Links:** A link, or hyperlink, is a part of a web page that, if clicked with a mouse, opens a different web page. Links are usually shown in blue and underlined on a webpage.
- Localised information:** Information that has been adapted from internationally sourced articles and papers to reflect Irish terminology, demographics, medical practices, trends and views.
- Log-in/User name:** A set of letters and symbols that have to be entered to access certain computer or online services. In this case, medical databases, journals, interactive services, etc. It usually requires a password to authenticate your identity.
- Mouse:** The small rounded device attached to the side of the computer that, when moved, moves the cursor on the computer screen.
- Online:** A word used as shorthand for 'on the Internet' or 'connected to the Internet'.
- Password:** The electronic, computer equivalent of, say, your PIN number (for a cash card). Your Internet username will need a password to prevent other people from accessing your email user account.
- Register:** To register means to create an identity online. For many services, it is important that the website knows your name, address, phone number, etc. For example, if

buying a book in an online bookshop, you need to provide this information. The online bookshop then records your details in a database of customers, which it later uses to post out the book to you. Registration is usually completed by filling in an online form, with fields for name, address and other information.

Scroll: Scrolling is the process of moving what you see on the screen upwards or downwards. This lets you view a web page, a document or some other computer material which is longer than what can be shown on a single screen-full. Scrolling is achieved using scroll-bars on the right hand side of the window that you are using to view the material. You can also scroll using the up and down arrow keys, the page-up and page-down keys and a mouse with a scroll-wheel.

Warranty: Written assurance that some product or service will be provided or will meet certain specifications.

Website: A website is a collection of web pages which displays information on a particular topic. Common types of websites include company websites (all about a company), online shops (where you buy goods and services and pay by credit card) and personal websites (where individuals share their interests). A website may consist of just one page of information, but will usually contain several pages, all linked together. All the pages in a website usually share the same 'domain' name. For example, all the pages in the large online shop 'Amazon' have an address (URL) that starts with 'www.amazon.com'.

World Wide Web: Also called the WWW or the Web. A service that sends information over the internet from web server programs to web browser programs. The browser then displays this information to the user on his computer screen.

Links

See our website www.lifesteps.ie for useful links to health related web sites.

Final Notes

The process of searching family health on the Internet is not as complicated as it might seem. Most websites are well designed, easy to use and category based. In general, the basic layout and logic is the same for all sites.

The number of Irish online health sites is quite good and the sites compare very favourably with their counterparts in the UK and US.

