Avoiding Harmful Information

Reading inaccurate or misleading health information can be harmful to us if we use that information to make decisions about our health. Likewise, receiving recommendations or advice from someone without the appropriate medical credentials can lead us to make choices that may cause us harm. Because of this risk, Della wants to avoid these types harmful sources of online health information. Della is already taking some precautions by evaluating health information websites.
She can also reduce her risk by exercising caution with specific types of websites. These sites can be helpful when sponsored by a trusted health organization. However, it is important to watch for the dangers associated with some of these types of websites.

Click each button to learn more about each type.

- Discussion Forums
- Symptom Checkers
- Blogs, Videos, and Podcasts
Discussion forums are websites where people write short messages to share their experiences, similar to a support group you might attend in person. Discussion forums provide a place for people to talk about their experiences with a specific health condition. In an online discussion forum you can send your message any time, and you don’t need to be in the same location as the other people in the group. However, people may share bad advice or bring a negative attitude. Be cautious about taking advice from strangers on the internet, and consult your doctor before acting on information received from any discussion forum. Forums that are sponsored or moderated by your healthcare provider may provide the best environment for safe sharing.
Symptom checkers are websites that ask a series of questions to help determine if you have a serious health condition. Some people like to use symptom checkers to determine if they need to see a doctor, or to identify over-the-counter medications to help them feel better. However, symptom checkers can be dangerous tools to use. If you think you have a serious health condition, you should always go see a doctor for a diagnosis. If your condition is not serious, you may be able to call a nurse’s hotline through your healthcare provider. A registered nurse can help determine if you need to see a doctor for further diagnosis.
Blogs, videos, and podcasts are examples of content that anyone can create and share on the internet. Blogs are websites where anyone can write their own articles or journal entries. Videos and podcasts are recordings, like those you might find on a site like YouTube or Stitcher. When it comes to health information, there are some blogs, videos, and podcasts that contain trustworthy content. However, it can be difficult to verify the accuracy of the information and the expertise of the person creating it. Always be sure to carefully evaluate this type of content to determine if it is a source you can trust.
Now Della knows to avoid certain types of health information content on the internet that could be harmful. She is ready to use her new skills to search for and evaluate health information online.

Remember that if you are searching for health information online and need help, you should ask for assistance at your local public library.