



Discussion About Your Internet Research

When your dog develops a medical issue, chances are you'll do some Internet research, and it's only natural that you would wish to talk with your veterinarian about what you've learned. I happen to enjoy hearing what my clients are discovering online. I sometimes come away with valuable new information, and I'm invariably amused by the extraordinary things they tell me. (Who knew that hip dysplasia is caused by global warming!)

Surf to your heart's content, but be forewarned, not all veterinarians feel as I do. Some have a hard time not "rolling their eyes" or quickly interrupting the moment the conversation turns to Internet research.

Who can blame them? They've grown weary of spending valuable office visit, telephone, or email time talking their clients out of the wackadoodle notions they've gleaned from cyberspace and reining them in from online wild goose chases.

Responsible Internet Surfing

Whether veterinarians like it or not, the Internet is here to stay. What can you do to make discussions with your vet regarding your online research more valuable? Presented below are some tips to help you differentiate instructive, accurate, credible Internet information from "online junk food." By the way, although I'm a veterinarian teaching people how to better care for their dogs, much of this information is also applicable to your own healthcare!

- Ask your veterinarian for her website recommendations, those that have already been "vetted."
- Veterinary college websites invariably provide reliable information. Search for them by entering "veterinary college" or "veterinary school" after the name of the disease or symptom you are researching.

- Web addresses ending in “.edu,” and “.gov” represent educational institutions and governmental agencies, respectively. Such sites will likely be sources of accurate information.
- If your dog has a breed-specific disease, pay a visit to the website hosted by the breed’s national organization. Up to date information may appear here long before it makes its way into something your veterinarian might read. Within veterinary journals there can be a lag time of one to two years between submission of new information and publication.
- Avoid business-sponsored websites that stand to make money when you believe and act on what they profess. Be dubious of the information found on websites recommending purchase of a product.
- Be ever so wary of anecdotal information (stories told by individuals about their own experiences). It’s perfectly okay to indulge yourself with remarkable tales (how Max’s skin disease was miraculously cured by a single session of aromatherapy), but view what you are reading as fiction rather than fact. As fascinating as these *National Enquirer*-type stories may seem, please don’t let them significantly influence the choices you make for your dog. As

much as you may want to believe that the story about Max applies to your Sophie, it is unlikely that they have the same disease or would experience the same response to therapy.

- I'm a big fan of most disease-specific online forums. Not only do they provide a wealth of educational information, they also offer you a large community of people who are dealing with the same challenge as you. Forum members can be a wonderful source of emotional support- always a good thing for those of us who share our homes and our hearts with a dog.

Look for a forum that focuses on a specific disease (kidney failure, diabetes, etc.), has lots of members, and has been up and running for several years. A large group such as this typically has multiple moderators who provide more than one point of view (always a good thing) and greater round-the-clock availability for advice and support.

Look for cited references (clinical research that supports what is being recommended). Such groups should have a homepage that explains the focus of the group and provides the number of members and posts per month (the more the better). They may have public archives of previous posts that can provide a wealth of information.