

The Dangers of “Dr. Google”



Technology has really changed the way we live and communicate. Twenty years ago, if you were driving to someplace you'd never been before, you either scribbled directions on a piece of paper or stopped at a gas station to ask for help. These days, with the simple click of a button on your smartphone, up-to-the-minute GPS-enabled directions are read to you through your car's speakers. Pretty cool. Technological advances such as smartphones and the Internet have made it beyond easy to find a world's worth of information right at your fingertips, including an abundance of health information. And although it's certainly convenient to just “ask Dr. Google” what's causing your knee to throb or what that white patch on your tongue is, you're better off asking someone with a real degree, because while there is certainly good information to be found online, there is also a lot of bad information. And you don't want to jeopardize your oral (and overall) health.

Let's say you wake up one morning with a toothache. You pull up a search engine and type in “toothache causes,” and 0.53 seconds later you're staring at 12,500,000 results. That's a lot of information, and the problem with these results is the spectrum of data. Yes, some of the information you find will be legitimate and accurate (pssst: the American Dental Association is always a safe bet), but it's all too easy to get lost in the face of a daunting number of pages, many of which are not vetted by oral health professionals.

Even worse, if you find yourself on a web forum—such as Reddit—you could be led astray by commenters downplaying symptoms or giving flat-out wrong information.

The fact is that a toothache could be the symptom of a litany of oral health conditions, such as tooth decay (or a cavity), gum inflammation or disease, an abscess, a fractured tooth, a broken filling, sensitivity, sinus issues, teeth grinding (aka bruxism), and complications from impacted wisdom teeth. Self-diagnosing could be dangerous to your health, because what if what you think is just teeth grinding turns out to be something more serious like an abscess? With the help of an examination, your dentist is the only one who can accurately diagnose the cause of your dental distress and provide the treatment to help you be on your way to a happier and healthier smile. Dentists are highly educated and receive a minimum of four years of dental education on the diagnosis, prevention, and treatment of diseases and conditions of the oral cavity. They are the only experts on oral health.

The Internet can be a great resource for learning more about the side effects of a new medication, finding support from people who share a medical condition, or reading reviews of a toothpaste for sensitive teeth. It's *not* the place to go for self-diagnosis. So, the next time you feel compelled to consult “Dr. Google” for what ails your mouth, close your laptop, pick up your phone, and call your dentist.

