

Dear Dr. Wise,

Question: I was wondering how useful the Internet would be for me to use concerning the health care of my pet. What do you think?

Answer: We live in an age of almost instantaneous information. 24-hour news stations, talk radio, and, of course, the Internet, have revolutionized the way we think and educate ourselves. It is easier than ever to research a topic and make decisions about almost any subject, even the medical care of our families and our pets. But is all that advice good? How do we filter what we find? How do we decide what is the best advice on caring for our four legged family members?

With the pet market expected to top more than \$36 billion this year, many businesses have turned to the Internet to reach more pet owners and broaden their markets. Searching for pet related items on the Web will find everything from pet psychics to pet pharmacies to training aids and toys. With this explosion of information, many people might ask: "Are there Internet pet sites that you can trust?"

Many of these sites are developed and maintained by trainers, breeders, and other animal experts. Perhaps some of these non-veterinary animal authorities have good basic knowledge of a limited area of animal behavior, breed, or even potentially, health issues. No one would likely question the advice and expertise of a trainer of champion Border Collies when it comes to the best way to work these dogs, but should we listen to his advice on heartworm preventative? More to the point, when is it ok to trust our pet's health to someone other than the family veterinarian?

For most pet owners their veterinarian is their primary source for advice. In fact, veterinarians consistently rank in the Top 5 of America's most trusted professions. Despite these warm feelings of trust, the urge and desire to save money on our pet's care is a big factor in who pet owners will turn to for advice. One example would be the increase in chat rooms, blogs, and other media sources that highlight pet "experts" other than veterinarians.

Anyone can post information on the Web. There is no requirement that the person actually be an expert. And while much valuable information can be found, there is also much that is inaccurate or just plain incorrect or dangerous.

When it comes to understanding how all aspects of a pet's environment, genetics, physical health, and even mental and emotional health are related, your family veterinarian, with his or her years of intensive post-graduate training in medicine and surgery, is still the best choice to provide you with the answers you need. Veterinarians have either a D.V.M. or a V.M.D. degree. This Doctor of Veterinary Medicine designation is your assurance of proper training and the completion of a university accredited curriculum. Just like your doctor, some veterinarians become specialists, focusing on internal medicine, dermatology, or even family practice.

Knowing this, a good place to start to find accurate and up-to-date information on animal health care, is your veterinarian's web site. Most veterinary sites have links to pre-approved veterinary medical sites, such as [www.veterinarypartner.com](http://www.veterinarypartner.com) or sites associated with the nearest veterinary teaching hospital. Additionally, your veterinarian's web site may allow you to order common pet medications and other treatments online. Some may allow you to even schedule an appointment or ask for advice.

The best part about visiting your family veterinarian's web site is the comfort of knowing it comes from your pet's doctor – who knows your pet and your family best.

Other trustworthy sites might include the website for the Companion Animal Parasite Council ([www.petsandparasites.com](http://www.petsandparasites.com)) or the kennel club website ([www.akc.org](http://www.akc.org)). Another site you can trust is [www.MyVNN.com](http://www.MyVNN.com). This site has a series of very interesting 2 minute videos on veterinary medical care.

The huge pipeline of information that is the Internet is wonderful. You have an incredible resource at your fingertips. But frankly it should come with a warning label – "Caution, the information you receive or the products you buy may or may not be correct! "

For the health care of your special pet friend, don't rely on third party sources with unknown qualifications. You, your veterinarian and your pet are the best team to ensure your pet lives a long and healthy life.

If you have a question, write Dr. Wise, Indiana Veterinary Medical Association, 201 S. Capitol Avenue, Suite 405, Indianapolis, IN, 46225, or [www.invma.org](http://www.invma.org)