

# Patients' Internet Use for Health-Related Purposes: A Cross-Sectional Study

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## Abstract

**Background and Aim:** Many people seek health information online, but misinformation can lead to incorrect medical decisions. The aim of the study was to assess patients' medical internet use and their intention to discuss online findings with doctors. **Materials and Methods:** The observational and cross-sectional study included a sample of patients with chronic non-communicable diseases who voluntarily participated in a health education and screening campaign, conducted in four cities in Romania during March-November 2024. Socio-demographic data and answers to seven specific questions were collected using a face-to-face questionnaire developed by the authors. The study was conducted with the approval of the ethics committee of George Emil Palade University of Medicine, Pharmacy, Science, and Technology of Targu Mures. **Results:** The study sample included 495 respondents. The mean age of respondents was 48.7 years; 72.9% were females, and 73.4% resided in urban areas. Approximately half of the respondents (51.2%) had a high school education or less, while 48.7% had post-secondary or university education. Over 65% of respondents searched for health information online frequently or sometimes, while 34.4% did so rarely or never. Most respondents (90.9%) searched for medical information using a mobile device, while fewer used laptops (19.9%), tablets (11.3%), or desktops (10.8%). The vast majority (94.1%) used Google to find medical information, while fewer relied on websites (21.2%), social media (15.0%), forums (9.6%), or artificial intelligence chatbots (3.9%). The vast majority (81.6%) believed that it would be useful to discuss online health information with doctors. More than half (57.4%) had asked a doctor to explain medical information found online, while 35.2% had not. Most respondents (84.8%) received a response from their doctor: 50.8% obtained a detailed answer, while 34.0% received a brief one. However, 10.9% felt that their questions were avoided or unwelcome. **Conclusions:** Most respondents frequently search for health information online, mainly using mobile devices and Google. Many patients appreciate discussing the health information they find online with doctors, highlighting the need for professional guidance. While most doctors provided answers, some patients perceived reluctance or avoidance, suggesting room for better communication.

**Keywords:** Health Information Seeking; Online Medical Searches; Doctor-Patient Communication; Mobile Health Technology; Artificial Intelligence Chatbots.

