

Mayo Clinic Q & A - Dr. Melanie Swift - Misinformation 01 12...

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SPEAKERS

Dr. Halena Gazelka, Narrator, Dr. Melanie Swift

N Narrator 00:01
Coming up on Mayo Clinic Q&A,

D Dr. Melanie Swift 00:03
It's like drinking from a fire hydrant of information that can be really confusing, particularly if you're getting information from all different sources. So, people often will get news, really from social media. That's probably the worst way to get your news, you get a mix of valid information and opinion, and frankly propaganda.

N Narrator 00:27
Finding credible information about COVID-19, vaccines, and the spread of variants can be a difficult task. Today on Mayo Clinic Q&A, we will offer tips on how you can find trusted sources and help you separate fact from fiction.

D Dr. Melanie Swift 00:42
If you're going to a website or vetting something that you've seen in social media, there are some tips that you can incorporate: Is this coming from a trusted site? Is this something that seems out of left field? Is this discordant from what you've been hearing from public health authorities? Can you run this by your doctor or provider? Your own provider is a trusted source of information.

D Dr. Halena Gazelka 01:10

Welcome, everyone to Mayo Clinic Q&A. I'm your host, Dr. Halena Gazelka. The information about COVID-19 changes rapidly, and it can be very difficult to keep up. The internet is a great source of information, but the opposite is true, too. So, how do you know if the information that you're looking at is reliable and accurate? Here with us to offer simple tips is Dr. Melanie Swift. She's a Mayo Clinic preventative medicine specialist. Thanks for being here today, Melanie.

D Dr. Melanie Swift 01:39

Thanks for having me, Halena.

D Dr. Halena Gazelka 01:41

Well, I have to say this is a really pertinent topic, and it has been for the past two years while we have been dealing with this. But I have never seen so much information on a topic as on COVID-19, and it seems to change almost hourly or daily for sure. So, how do people know that they're getting reliable information?

D Dr. Melanie Swift 02:02

Yeah, you're absolutely right. There is. It's like drinking from a fire hydrant of information. And so, it can be really confusing, particularly if you're getting information from all different sources. So, people often will get news, really from social media, and that's probably the worst way to get your news, honestly, because you get a mix of valid information and opinion, and, frankly, propaganda. So, yeah. So, online there are some places that you can reliably go and get information that you can trust. So, the CDC is one site that obviously has lots of information about COVID-19. When things change, guidance changes. That's the first place that that guidance change is going to happen. So, that's a trusted source. Healthcare institutions like Mayo Clinic and other academic medical centers will maintain websites that have trusted, vetted information that medical experts have reviewed. There are also some organizations like the American Medical Association, or the Infectious Diseases Society of America, IDSA. So, those professional medical organizations will put information on their website that you can trust.

D Dr. Halena Gazelka 03:45

Is that information in simple terms that anyone can understand, or not necessarily?

D Dr. Melanie Swift 03:51

Yeah, no, they actually do have patient facing education on those sites that are really intended for the general public. Yes, there will be some other information that's targeted to their physician members, but patients are able to go there and get information that they can digest as well.

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Dr. Halena Gazelka 04:13

So, those are some good sources that people can look at. But what sort of information should people be leery of? And what are the warning signs that information may not be credible?

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Dr. Melanie Swift 04:23

There are a lot of organizations that are putting information out there, and the organization may have a name that sounds reasonable. But in fact, is a front for just someone's personal opinion, or perhaps some group that's got an agenda, political or otherwise. So, going to a site like that first of all if you've never heard of this organization before, be a little bit wary. There should be an About Us tab on that website where you can click and learn more about the organization, who's behind it, who funds it, do they have a board, and who's on that board. So, you want to be sure that if you're going to an organization that's putting out information, that it's a nonprofit, that they're transparent about who's running the site, and who the leaders of the organization are and what their credentials are.

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Dr. Halena Gazelka 05:28

Melanie, you wrote a piece about misinformation and how individuals might identify it and avoid it. Would you run us through your tips that you provided?

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Dr. Melanie Swift 05:38

Sure, sure. So, this is sort of the sniff test, I call it. You know, if you're going to a website or vetting something that you've seen in social media, there are some tips that you can sort of incorporate to ask yourself a little sort of checklist. So, first of all, is this coming from a trusted site, like CDC? So, that's good. Second is, is this something that seems out of left field? Is this discordant from what you've been hearing from public health authorities, from CDC? Can you run this by your doctor or provider? Because your own provider is a trusted source of information and can help you vet this kind of information. So, does it seem to be making a claim that is miraculous, or that is, you know, flying in the face of what other trusted sources are saying? So, those are all really red flags that this probably is not a claim that you want to promote or believe. You can also type the claim into a Google search, and you will often find that it's already been refuted. You can find that, you know, it's already been investigated and found to be a false claim or is part of a misinformation campaign that way.

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Dr. Halena Gazelka 07:15

Melanie, I have found that even as a physician, I have difficulty sifting through all of the information that is available on COVID-19, and I rely on experts such as yourself to help be aware of what's in the medical literature that actually is valid and reliable data. So, I can only imagine it's very difficult for everyone to sift through. Now how do individuals protect themselves and protect from sharing information that may or may not be credible? I think that sometimes things are propagated because people keep putting them on social media or other venues.

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Dr. Melanie Swift 07:59

Absolutely. Yeah, absolutely. Sometimes when people say they've done research, what they've done is actually just an internet search looking for something that supports what they want to say. So, just because someone says, I have done my research, and I learned this fact, do not believe that that's a vetted fact. All those tips that we just talked about are good things to do to check it out. But ultimately, sometimes you just can't determine if what they're saying is true or not. So, the bottom line is if you're not sure, don't share it. Especially if it's something that's counter to public health advice right now, because there is a lot of misinformation. Unfortunately, some of it is intentional, but a lot of it is also just well-meaning people who've heard something that sounds like it's important. They may not have vetted it to see if it's true, but they share it because it sounds very interesting. And that's the kind of thing that can kind of go viral within a social network, and then other people start to believe it. So, if you're not sure, don't share.

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Dr. Halena Gazelka 09:12

Those are great tips, Melanie. And I think this is important for topics other than COVID-19, too. As a physician, I often have patients bring in information, and they'll ask me while I read about this. And so, I will either look into it or I will already know the medical literature, because it's in a topic that is in my expertise and be able to share that with them. So, I think these tips are terrific. Thank you for sharing with us today.

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Dr. Melanie Swift 09:37

Glad you mentioned expertise. Can I add one other thing?

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Dr. Halena Gazelka 09:40

Yes, please.

D

Dr. Melanie Swift 09:42

Information about COVID-19 that's coming from medical experts will typically be coming from an expert who's trained in the field. So, they're either trained in infectious diseases, or pulmonary medicine, or public health and preventive medicine, but probably not from a field that's completely unrelated. You know, so if someone's training was in say gastroenterology or cardiology or something else, and they're espousing some views and opinions about COVID-19, or the COVID vaccines that is counter to public health, you need to be very suspicious of that because really the authoritative voice on those issues are coming from people that were trained in that specialty.

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Dr. Halena Gazelka 10:35

That's a great point. Thank you for being here today, Melanie.

D Dr. Melanie Swift 10:39
Thank you for having me.

D Dr. Halena Gazelka 10:41
Our thanks to Dr. Melanie Swift, preventative medicine specialist at Mayo Clinic, for being here today to talk to us about where should we get information on COVID-19, and how do we know if we can trust it. I hope that you learned something. I know that I did. We wish each of you a wonderful day.

N Narrator 10:59
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