

Feeling sick makes us less social online too

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People turn to social media for health information, but they're slow to post their own info.

(Medical Xpress)—When it comes to posting on social media, there are few areas of our lives that are off limits.

We post about eating, working, playing, hunting, quilting – you name it. Just about everything is up for public consumption ... except our health.

A new study from BYU finds that while most of us go online regularly for help in diagnosing health issues, very few of us actually post information, questions or experiences on health topics.

"Less than 15 percent of us are posting the health information that most of us are consuming," said Rosemary Thackeray, BYU professor of health science and lead author of the study appearing online in the *Journal of Medical Internet Research*.

According to the study, more than 60 percent of Internet users go online for health help, looking for advice, digging up user experiences on [social media](#) and consulting online reviews in hunt of health providers and health care facilities.

Thackeray believes if people were more "social" about health information on social media, the better the information would become.

"If you only have a few people sharing their experience with using a [painkiller](#), that's different than 10,000 people doing that," Thackeray said. "If we're really going to use this social media aspect, there needs to be a true collective wisdom of the crowds."

According to data Thackeray and BYU colleagues Ben Crookston and Josh West used from the Pew Internet and American Life Project, three-fourths of people begin their hunt for medical or health information online by using a search engine such as [Google](#) or Yahoo.

By the end of their search, nearly a third have used [social networking sites](#) (Facebook, [Twitter](#)) for health-related activities while 41 percent have consulted online rankings or reviews of doctors and health care facilities.

However, only 10 percent of respondents actually posted reviews and 15 percent posted comments, questions or information when it came to health-related info.

"The inherent value of 'social' in social media is not being captured with online health information seeking," Thackeray said. "Social media is still a good source of health information, but I don't think it's ever going to replace providers or traditional [health care](#) sources."

But, the researchers say social media could be more valuable to all parties if more people joined in on the health discussion. Patients could become more empowered and doctors could be more aware of the public discourse around certain medical issues.

The challenge now is how to get more people to contribute health info on social media sites.

"We're just not there yet, but we'll probably get there in the future," Thackeray said.

Provided by Brigham Young University

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