Why go online when you have pain? A qualitative analysis of teenagers’ use of the Internet for pain management advice

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26 healthy, school attending, adolescents aged between 14 and 17 years old

## Implications For Parents About

Parental practices / parental mediation

## Implications For Educators About

Digital citizenship

# Abstract

Background Adolescents are routinely recognized as native to online technologies. However,we know from previous research that this familiarity does not often translate into its use forhelp-seeking around health. We designed this study to examine the experience of adolescents inusing the Internet to access pain management information, speciﬁcally why some adolescents maybe reluctant to use these resources.Methods Twenty-six healthy, school attending, adolescents aged between 14 and 17 years oldwere recruited to a qualitative study of focus groups. Seventeen participants were female and ninewere male. Participation was limited to those who self-selected as frequent users of the Internet,but who were loath to use it as a resource for health information as we wished to explore reasonsfor non-use. All data were thematically analysed.Results Most participants reported using the Internet to seek health information at least once.Experiences with online content were typically negative and drawn on only when all other sourcesof information and pain coping were exhausted.Three themes emerged, Drivers of Internet use,Barriers, and Anxiety around use. Adolescent health websites were repor ted to be confusing, anxiet yprovoking and hard to negotiate. The Internet was judged to be less accessible than other forms ofpain and health coping information. Secondary themes related to topic embarrassment, the strive forindependence and reassurance, preferred information source failure, curiosity, website design, availabilityof OTC analgesics, effort, fear-provoking narratives, mistrust of quality of online content and pain-relatedanxiety.Conclusions Counter to many positive reports of the health beneﬁts of Internet use duringinformation seeking, its value is questionable to some adolescents. Typical experience was anxietyprovoking, unlikely to yield helpful results, and wasteful comparative to off-line resources for pain.

# Outcome

See abstract