

Guidance and best practices for using AI

The rise of generative AI has led to an explosion in the public availability of AI-powered tools, which Americans increasingly use to carry out a range of activities, including looking up health information and asking for health advice. A 2024 poll by KFF found that “About one in six adults (17%) say they use AI chatbots at least once a month to find health information and advice, rising to one quarter of adults under age 30 (25%).”¹

While it is not a substitute for visiting a healthcare professional, AI can be a useful tool to conduct preliminary health research. However, when using AI to search for health information or advice, it is important that users keep certain best practices and considerations in mind. The best practices outlined below should inform efforts from health information communicators, such as government agencies, experts, and health care providers, to educate people on how they can safely and effectively use AI tools to find health information on their own.

- **Use AI as a supplementary tool:** Users should turn to AI as a tool to begin or supplement their research — i.e., provide contextual information — rather than thinking of it as a comprehensive research tool that provides completely accurate information.²
- **Engage in rigorous verification:** AI outputs should never be taken at face value. It is important to fact-check AI output for accuracy and reliability (e.g., broken links, outdated or false info, hallucinations, etc.), particularly when it comes to health information.
- **Be specific in what you ask, but avoid sharing sensitive information:** Precision is key — vague prompts will lead to broad, generalized answers, which may not be accurate or provide users with the information they are seeking. For instance, “specifying your age, sex, preexisting health condition, or anything specific in your back-and-forth with the chatbot will make its suggestions more useful.”³ However, users should avoid sharing sensitive information or images with AI chatbots/search engines, as they cannot guarantee that their information will be kept private. According to the American Medical Association, “Many AI tools, especially those offered by large data companies such as Google, have few regulations protecting patient data and are not covered by HIPAA. As a result, patients should be cautious and deliberate about the type of personal medical information they share with online AI tools.”⁴
- **Ask for credible sources:** AI platforms scrape a wide range of internet sources to find information and answer users’ questions — all of these sources may not be reputable or have verified information. Users should always ask AI platforms or chatbots to cite credible sources for all their information. Information from vetted sources of medical information, such as the CDC, FDA, Mayo Clinic, or reputable health news sources, is more likely to be accurate.
- **Follow up:** If your AI’s first output is off the mark, try a follow-up request with instructions for improvement, and be specific about what you are looking for in the follow-up prompt.⁵
- **Avoid conflicting terms and ambiguity:** Long and complex prompts sometimes include ambiguous or contradictory terms. The most effective prompts use positive language and avoid negative language — in other words, “Do say ‘do,’ and don’t say ‘don’t.’”⁶

1. Presiado, Marley, Alex Montero, Lunna Lopes, and Liz Hamel. “KFF Health Misinformation Tracking Poll: Artificial Intelligence and Health Information.” KFF Health News, 15 August 2024, <https://www.kff.org/health-information-trust/poll-finding/kff-health-misinformation-tracking-poll-artificial-intelligence-and-health-information/#:~:text=One%20in%20Six%20Adults%20%E2%80%93%20and,at%20least%20once%20a%20month>.

2. McMillan, Carrie. “Generative AI for Health Information: A Guide to Safe Use.” Yale Medicine, 8 January 2024, <https://www.yalemedicine.org/news/generative-ai-artificial-intelligence-for-health-info>.

3. Berg, Sara. “What doctors wish patients knew about using AI for health tips.” American Medical Association (AMA), 13 September 2024, <https://www.ama-assn.org/practice-management/digital-health/what-doctors-wish-patients-knew-about-using-ai-health-tips>.

4. Rendall, Jessica. “ChatGPT for Self-Diagnosis: AI Is Changing the Way We Answer Our Own Health Questions.” CNET, 15 January 2024, <https://www.cnet.com/health/medical/chatgpt-for-self-diagnosis-ai-is-changing-the-way-we-answer-our-own-health-questions/>.

5. Fitzpatrick, Alex. “5 tips for using AI at work.” Axios, 7 March 2025, <https://www.axios.com/local/austin/2025/03/07/ai-workplace-tips-austin>.

6. Bigelow, Stephen J. “12 prompt engineering best practices and tips.” TechTarget, 19 March 2025, <https://www.techtarget.com/searchenterpriseai/tip/Prompt-engineering-tips-and-best-practices>.

The following are sample AI prompts that follow the best practices outlined above:

