

Web surfing to weigh up bariatric surgery options

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Obese people considering weight-reducing bariatric surgery are only topped by pregnant women when it comes to how often they turn to the Internet for health advice. While most use it to read up on relevant procedures and experiences, one in every four patients actually chooses a surgeon based solely on what he or she has gleaned from, in particular, websites hosted by public hospitals and former patients. This is according to a study in Springer's journal *Obesity Surgery*, led by Luca Paolino of the Joseph Ducuing Hospital in Toulouse, France.

In a questionnaire completed by 212 candidates for [bariatric surgery](#), Paolino and his colleagues assessed if the participants had access to the Internet and what role the e-health information they read ultimately played in their decision whether or not to undergo surgery. The researchers also assessed how useful and trustworthy the participants found the Internet information, and how they verified the facts they read.

It was found that the vast majority (77.8 percent) of participants used the Internet, in particular, to seek information about different surgical procedures and to learn from the experiences of [patients](#) with similar conditions. According to Paolino, only one previous study on [pregnant women](#) noted a higher rate (95 percent) of Internet e-health use among a specific group of patients.

Just over half of the patients found relevant e-information on the topics quite easily. Participants generally preferred the advice provided by

[public hospitals](#) or patients' associations to that of popular media websites or the pharmaceutical industry. However, the majority of patients (92.6 percent) still verified the e-information they read with other sources such as their general medical practitioners, family and friends. Only a minority of patients (16.2 percent) did not trust what they read about the topic on the web as a whole.

A little more than three-quarters of the bariatric [surgery](#) patients also largely take their lead from their general practitioners about which hospital or surgeon to choose. However, Paolino and his colleagues found that one in every four patients relies only on Internet information to choose their surgeon - indicative of the popularity of using the web to read up on the matter.

"The Internet has already become an important source of knowledge in patients' decision-making processes. Therefore it is important to create or promote independent high-quality healthcare websites and to integrate them into discussions with patients," is Paolino's advice to health professionals.

More information: Paolino, L. et al. (2015). The web-surfing bariatric patient: the role of the Internet in the decision-making process, *Obesity Surgery*. [DOI: 10.1007/s11695-015-1578-x](https://doi.org/10.1007/s11695-015-1578-x)

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