

Online health information—keep it simple

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Australian health websites are too difficult for many people to read. Provided by Wiley

This is the finding from a study published in *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health*.

Matthew Dunn and Christina Cheng from Deakin University evaluated Australian online health information to see if it matched the [reading level](#) of Australians.

"Limited availability of 'easy-to-read' health materials suggests that many Australians may not be benefiting from the convenience of the internet," Dr Dunn said.

"For example, more than 12 million Australians were overweight or obese in 2007, yet the 17 [web pages](#) found that formally discussed obesity were among the hardest to read."

If information is difficult to read, many readers may misinterpret it, leading to inappropriate healthcare decisions.

About 16 million Australians are active online and almost 80% of them seek out [health information](#) on the internet.

"Reading habits on the web are different from reading printed information. Web users tend to skim a page before deciding to read further, which can leave important information unread," Dr Dunn said.

"The flexible and interactive nature of the internet has provided health professionals with a tool to increase knowledge of health matters in the population.

"Websites need to be assessed for readability and changes need to be made so that a larger proportion of the population can understand their information."

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