

How to Know When Research is Trustworthy

The following tips provide an index of what you should look for to determine whether a source of information is quality research

- ✓ Randomized controlled trials: These types of studies are the gold standard for quality research. In this study design, all subjects are randomized to the control and experimental groups by computer allocation or another randomization method. This removes experimenter bias, as researchers have no part in determining which patient is assigned to a particular condition. Additionally, the use of a control group is effective in comparing the results of each condition, allowing researchers to determine whether the tested variable had a significant effect.
- ✓ Double-blind studies: These studies remove both experimenter and subject bias as both parties are unaware of which condition they assigned. Rather, a third party keeps track of subject allocation.
- ✓ Large subject pool: Having more subjects in a study increases the efficacy of the study results. With a greater tested population, this reduces the effect of any one person on the overall results, such that the final observations reflect an average of the total subject pool.
- ✓ Websites: When considering information derived from websites a general rule of thumb is to notice the URL of the site. Website addresses ending in .org, .edu or .gov are typically acceptable sources, as they come from institutions of higher education, government entities or schools.
- ✓ Meta-analysis: This type of study combines the results of many other primary sources to determine any trends in the results. Meta-analyses are of very high quality as they combine several studies, and will therefore be less influenced by local findings than will single studies.
- ✓ A methodology is included: A research paper should always provide a detailed methodology explaining how the study was conducted, which variables were measured, details about the subject pool, how variables were measured and any inclusion/exclusion criteria.
- ✓ Research published by a company: Caution must be exercised when evaluating any research provided by a company about their product. There is a big potential for bias, as the company may be trying to promote the benefits of their product, even at the expense result validity.

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Note: The information provided should not replace medical advice and represents only some of the research conducted on each topic