Pain-free pill identification using Pillbox

by Cynthia Johnson

The National Library of Medicine (NLM) in Bethesda, MD, has written a prescription to help alleviate the pain that healthcare professionals and consumers encounter when they struggle to identify unknown medications. Its recently released Pillbox (beta) platform lets users swiftly attach a drug name to unknown solid-dosage medications (tablets/capsules).

The drug identification tool is distinctive in that it enables users to identify medications based on physical characteristics and high-resolution images with appearance information (e.g., imprint, shape, color, size, and scoring). These features allow users to visually search for and identify unknown medications.

Pillbox offers two methods of identifying an unknown pill. Its Quick Search allows users to identify a pill using basic information, and its Advanced Search allows users to search by drug name, inactive ingredients, and other factors. After Pillbox successfully IDs a medication through its Advanced Search, it provides the user with links to drug information and drug labels.

The story behind Pillbox is as remarkable as the tool itself. The NLM developed it using unconventional project management methods—particularly for the federal government. According to project manager David Hale, Pillbox applied startup principles and relied on community engagement to design and develop the user-friendly platform.

Resuscitating a project with community engagement

The Pillbox project began in 2004 when the NLM began taking pictures of the pills that the Department of Veterans Affairs had in stock and talking with poison control centers about how they could access and use the data.

The project hit a roadblock when management and funding changes occurred. At that point, the NLM appointed Hale as the sole person working on the project.

Due to funding limitations, Hale says he decided to take the development of the project outside of the federal government. In 2007, he turned to Health Camp and other healthcare-related
Pillbox
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“unconferences” that allow users to set an agenda for a conference and invite attendees to set the sessions and tracks.

Hale used Health Camp as the incubator for Pillbox. He invited a multidisciplinary team of attendees who expressed interest in the tool’s design and development to participate. They included individuals from the health IT startup community, lawyers, physicians, and patient advocates such as e-Patient Dave deBronkart (epatientdave.com) and Jen McCabe.

“David did a great job pulling in different people,” says Ash Damle, who worked on the Pillbox application programming interface (API). “It’s an example of collaboration done well. It allowed a very useful product to be born.”

Hale also spent time observing healthcare professionals by shadowing pharmacists, emergency medical technicians, and medication cart employees. He listened to their medication identification challenges and designed Pillbox to help overcome them.

“When people ask me who my target users are, I tell them everybody,” Hale says. “We’re not building it for a specific user; we’re building it for specific challenges. You could have those challenges if you’re a physician or if you’re a caregiver of an elderly relative.”

Iana Simeonov, marketing and communications director for the California Poison Control System, became involved with the project prior to the beta test. Because the poison center’s primary goal is to serve consumers, Simeonov envisions using Pillbox to meet the needs of nonconsumers who are trying to contact their busy call center.

“We’d been thinking about how it would be great for people to have a way to identify pills by looking at them,” says Simeonov, who describes Pillbox as a “great, very worthwhile project.”

“Law enforcement calls us after they’ve arrested someone with a plastic baggie full of pills,” she says. “Pillbox can be hugely useful to us with law enforcement professionals who need to know what the pills are.”
A government project using startup principles

Although Pillbox is a government endeavor, it doesn’t have the price tag that many Americans associate with such projects. In fact, it has such little funding that it ran much like a lean startup company, pulling in available resources to get the job done.

“When I realized I had no budget, I just looked at the startup community and realized that they get things accomplished without a budget,” says Hale. “We used the same lean startup principles.”

For example, the NLM collaborates with the FDA, which is funding a photography research program that creates the high-resolution images that Pillbox can use. This relationship allowed Hale to tap into the FDA’s expertise and use the agency in a consultative role.

As a result, Hale says that Pillbox contains a “mash up” of data between multiple data sets, such as the FDA drug label data and the NLM’s RxNorm data (www.nlm.nih.gov/research/umls/rxnorm). The NLM created its own search and logic system to combine the data and drive the user’s experience, he says.

“We’ve encapsulated the knowledge and expertise of these two groups at the NIH [National Institutes of Health] and the FDA,” says Hale. “When you visit Pillbox, it’s like you’re sitting with an FDA regulator, a pharmacist, a computer scientist, a database expert, and the individuals from the Health Camp meetings. As a citizen, you don’t need to know that you need to have all these people to identify a pill because of the way that data is spread out and structured.”

What’s a little ‘co-opetition’ between friends?

Because the government is taking the lead on the project, it assumes the risks for the private sector. Hale says this drives “co-opetition.” He defines this as the government and private sector working together and competing at the same time. The private sector pushes NLM for more data, and it continues to develop useful tools using the API.

The API is also how the application will likely realize its full potential. Hale estimates that only 3% of the American public knows about the National Institutes of Health (NIH), even fewer people know about the NLM, and even fewer have heard of Pillbox.

“We’re going to see the most value by taking Pillbox data and turning it into a platform instead of just offering it through our website,” says Hale. “If you have health IT developers in Silicon Valley and college students building on this application, then they’re going to reach a far larger audience than we ever could.”

This concept isn’t new to the government. Currently, Hale says, roughly 40% of the queries that enter PubMed (www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed) are from people who access it through its API and not the PubMed.gov website. He expects that Pillbox will experience similar acceptance from API users given its function.

“This is about bringing your citizens in and letting them tell you about their challenges,” says Hale. “You decide how your data needs to be structured and create systems where those citizens, the [health] IT community, or private sector groups create those solutions.”

According to Hale, developers are already creating smartphone applications using Pillbox’s data and search engine, which is accessible through the API. For example, one student at The George Washington University recently created a voice-activated drug identification system. The application, called Pillbox by Voice, uses real-time voice recognition and voice synthesis. Because of these features, users can call a phone number and verbally answer questions about a questionable pill. The application will then identify the pill and tell the user more about it.

Damle is the founder of MEDgle (www.medgle.com), a startup company that has developed a personalized medical search engine. In the next two to three months, he says he will begin adding Pillbox data into MEDgle so that users of his site can view medication images in order to better recognize their medications.

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“I think Pillbox is a good example of work done by the government that’s really enabling space in a market where there wasn’t any before,” says Damle.

Adding to its Pillbox of tools

Recently, Pillbox received an e-mail from a school nurse who found a pill that did not have an imprint. She had called the poison control center, which could not identify it; the center instructed her to contact Pillbox. Pillbox was also unable to identify the pill because it did not have an imprint, and the tool didn’t have a search category for pills without an imprint.

Hale’s research revealed that there weren’t any drug identification tools that let users search for a pill without an imprint, including the poison control center database.

“I don’t know how everybody missed that, including us,” he says. “But that’s the power of an engaged community.” In a few days, programmers rewrote the Pillbox code and created an advanced search category checkbox called “pill does not have an imprint.”

Ultimately, the nurse was able to identify the pill and thanked the Pillbox team for its assistance.

A similar situation occurred when someone wanted to know the inactive ingredients of medications in Pillbox. Interestingly enough, Hale says, there are cases of drugs used to treat asthma that contain inactive ingredients that can aggravate asthma.

The Pillbox team worked with the FDA to parse out its inactive ingredient data so users would have access to the information. Hale says he believes that Pillbox is one of the first tools that lets users access those data.

Early next year, Pillbox plans to reproduce its development process using the data set to determine how it relates to drugs and lactation, Hale says. “If there’s a group that’s more active than those interested in medication identification, then it’s nursing moms,” he says.

Hale, a self-proclaimed advocate and evangelist for open government, says he wants to prove that the Pillbox model can work. He’d like to take the model and teach other agencies how to apply it using their own data.

Although the general public hasn’t heard much about this project, Hale points out that Pillbox is working together with the U.S. General Services Administration (GSA) to change that.

The GSA recently launched Apps.gov Now (http://citizen.apps.gov). The tool provides federal agencies with the ability to enhance their site with blogs, wikis, and forums in order to engage the public.

“We’re one of the first groups testing it,” says Hale. “We’re going to use it to better communicate what’s happening with Pillbox.”

Pillbox (beta)

Pillbox is currently under development and is not intended for clinical use. It is presented for evaluation as a research and development method. If you suspect a poisoning emergency, call the national Poison Help hotline at 800/222-1222.
New on the ‘net

New method for screening infants

Researchers who study how drugs such as morphine affect infants now have some new screening tools. According to an MIT Technology Review article, newborns can’t spare much blood for testing; however, a new method of screening miniscule amounts of dried blood for chemicals could now enable researchers to get the information they need.

The researchers’ first goal is to produce a drug-dosing guide for infants. The list of other applications for the screening tool is far longer, said Jeffrey Galinkin, an anesthesiologist at the University of Colorado who is heading up the effort.

Infection specialists could one day use the technique to diagnose HIV or tuberculosis, for example. Sports officials could also use it to monitor athletes for banned substances, he said.

Five ways to boost physician acceptance of EMRs

The process of implementing electronic medical record (EMR) systems involves many moving parts. Hospital leaders should pay attention to how the process of EMR affects end users, particularly physicians, since they are the hospital’s primary source of revenue.

A recent HealthLeaders Media article identifies five things that every hospital should do for physicians when implementing EMRs:

1. Identify physician champions
2. Design a training program that accounts for varying needs
3. Make super users available during go-live
4. Allow providers extra time during go-live
5. Provide special amenities to take the pain out of launching the software

Data breaches cost hospitals $6 billion yearly

Hospitals spend $6 billion annually as a result of data breaches. Federal regulations enacted under the HITECH Act have not improved the safety of patient records, according to research from The Ponemon Institute, reports an article in HealthLeaders Media.

The following are among the findings of the data security and privacy research firm:

» Hospitals are not protecting patient data

» Hospitals admit to being vulnerable to a data breach

» Breaches of patient information occur frequently and often go unreported, putting patients’ privacy at risk

Memorial Health of CO plans to hire 200 and build physician network

More than 200 new hires, a new physicians’ network, and a new, consumer-friendly pricing structure were the highlights of Memorial Health System’s proposed 2011 budget presented to the Colorado Springs City Council.

The Colorado Springs Gazette reports this is happening at a time when the hospital faces an uncertain future in regard to continued city ownership of the hospital and shifts facing the healthcare industry.

The commission studying Memorial’s future recommended converting the hospital from city ownership to an independent nonprofit. If the council and the city voters agree in April 2011, this may be the last budget that the hospital approves.
New on the net

» A small percentage of healthcare organizations rely on security technologies to prevent and detect data breach incidents
» Federal regulations have not improved the safety of patient records
» The average cost for a compromised record is approximately $144 in indirect costs and $60 in direct costs

The newest heart test is low-tech
Expensive medical tests such as CT scans and MRIs can help doctors better diagnose disease. However, an article in The Wall Street Journal highlights the fact that sometimes the best tools physicians use are low-tech, such as a tape measure or a bathroom scale.

A new study suggests that cardiologists may want to add a stopwatch to their medical bag. More than half of patients who undergo open-heart surgery in the United States and Canada are at least 65 years old. Timing how long it takes an elderly patient to walk 5 meters, or about 15 ft., significantly improves a doctor’s ability to predict whether a patient will be able to withstand the rigor and stress of surgery, the study found.

AT&T forms unit to focus on health technologies
AT&T, Inc., has developed technologies that can help patients track their health, let their doctors store records online, and send a wireless signal directly to their pill bottles to remind them to take their medications or renew their prescriptions. These and other innovations have prompted Dallas-based AT&T to create a new business unit called AT&T ForHealth to bring its healthcare-related businesses together, according to an article in The Dallas Morning News.

AT&T hopes to focus on these new services and technologies and partner with healthcare-specific providers to bring new products to the market.

The company’s healthcare-related products and services generate sales of about $4 billion per year. It expects healthcare IT services spending nationally to total $33.9 billion this year and to grow 24% over the next four years.

Implanted chip allows blind people to detect objects
Mikka Terho, 46, of Finland, was fitted with an experimental chip behind his retina in Germany. According to a BBC News article, the chip enables patients to detect objects with their eyes, unlike other approaches that use an external camera.
Researchers have tested the subretinal chip on 11 patients. Details of the work can be found in the journal *Proceedings of the Royal Society B*.

**Study: Electronic alerts to doctors can reduce unnecessary tests**

Targeting alerts in electronic medical systems can greatly reduce unnecessary tests that yield false positives, according to a study by Kaiser Permanente.

The study found that an electronic alert sent to physicians when they ordered a blood test for elderly patients reduced unnecessary use of tests that often produce false positives for the elderly, reports an article in *Computerworld*. The alert simply told the physicians that the test was not reliable for that age group.

The study was among the first to look at the effectiveness of sending electronic alerts for a specific condition in a specific patient population. Kaiser Permanente focused on a blood test called the D-dimer, which is used to detect clots. In reality, the test only detects chronic inflammation, an indicator that a patient may have a clot and therefore would warrant further testing. Although the D-dimer test is effective in spotting the possibility of clots in younger patients, the older a patient gets, the more likely they are to suffer from chronic inflammatory conditions, which can trigger false positives.

**Social media cuts healthcare costs**

A report has concluded that social media initiatives that help physicians, patients, and the medical research community share patient information will also help drive down healthcare-related costs while improving the quality of care, according to an *InformationWeek* article.

Drawing on a number of case studies across the country, the report, “Healthcare Performance in the Era of Twitter,” by the Healthcare Performance Management Institute gives examples of how social media and other Health 2.0 initiatives are transforming the healthcare marketplace to promote a cost-efficient interactive healthcare system that provides better patient outcomes.

**Implant could ease balance problems**

A man from Yakima, WA, became the first patient to receive an implant designed to quell the disabling attacks of vertigo that result from a condition called Meniere’s disease. According to an MIT *Technology Review* article, the device, developed by researchers at the University of Washington, is the first therapeutic implant to treat a disorder of the vestibular system. The implant is modeled after the cochlear implant. However, rather than treat deafness, it treats disorders of the inner ear. The researchers hope that the device will help not only treat the disease, but also pave the way for more complex devices for balance disorders.

**Hospitals, health systems drive EHR adoption**

Medical offices owned by hospitals and health systems saw the biggest jump in electronic health record (EHR) adoption rates between January and October of 2010, according to the latest results of
New on the net

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an ongoing survey released by SK&A, a provider of healthcare information solutions and research.

The latest findings from the biannual survey, “Physicians’ Office Usage of Electronic Healthcare Records Software,” show that EHR adoption at hospital-owned offices grew from 44.1% to 54.9%, a 10.8% increase, according to the InformationWeek article. Adoption at health system-owned offices grew from 50.2% to 61.2%, an 11% increase. Overall, U.S. medical office EHR adoption has grown from 36.1% to 38.7%, a 3% increase.

Hospitals’ data sharing improves surgical care

Hospitals that have been given incentives to collaborate with one another can significantly reduce surgical complications, according to a study conducted by the Michigan Surgical Quality Collaborative (MSQC), a group of hospitals throughout the state that joined to help improve surgical outcomes. The study has been published in the Archives of Surgery.

The Blue Cross Blue Shield–funded study paid hospitals to pool and share patient data in hopes of using the information to help lower adverse events related to surgery, according to a HealthLeaders Media article. BCBSM also covered technology costs related to data acquisition and analysis.

The analysis found that blood infections, septic shock, prolonged ventilation use, and cardiac arrest decreased approximately 10% among hospitals that shared data, versus the control group that did not collaborate with one another in which complications did not experience any measurable reduction.

HIPAA, HITECH final rules expected by early 2011

HIPAA and HITECH final rules could be published by the end of this year or early next year, a top lawyer for the Office for Civil Rights (OCR) says. According to a HealthLeaders Media article, Adam H. Greene, JD, a senior health information and privacy specialist for OCR, gave that prediction during the Fourth Annual HIPAA Summit West: Healthcare Privacy and Security After HITECH and Health Reform. This past summer, Greene accurately predicted that there would be a proposed rule on changes to the HIPAA Privacy, Security, and Enforcement Rules.

Radiation patients endanger public, congressman says

The public is being unwittingly exposed to potentially dangerous levels of radiation from patients released from the hospital after undergoing therapy with radioactive isotopes, according to Rep. Edward J. Markey (D-MA).

In a letter Markey wrote to the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC), he said this has occurred “because of weak NRC regulations, ineffective oversight of those who administer those medical treatments, and inadequate NRC enforcement.”

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Hospitals are becoming interested in remote monitoring services such as the one described. Beginning in 2012, Medicare and Medicaid will stop reimbursing hospitals for heart failure readmission rates that occur within 90 days. A single readmission can cost $10,000–$40,000 or more.

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and the absence of clear guidance to patients and to physicians that provide procedures to ensure that such exposures do not occur,” according to a HealthLeaders Media article.

Markey says the NRC should revise its 1997 rule making hospitalization mandatory for patients treated with levels of the isotope I-131 at doses above internationally accepted thresholds. It should also aggressively enhance its oversight of its medical licenses and its ability to better identify, track, and respond to regulatory violations.

Real-time blood monitoring may lessen the need for transfusions during surgery

A new technology might help doctors get instant data about a patient’s need for extra blood during surgery. According to a Scientific American article, the device uses different wavelengths of light to assess the amount of hemoglobin in a patient’s bloodstream without breaking the skin.

In a small clinical trial of elective orthopedic surgery procedures (such as knee and hip replacements), researchers found that standard protocol, which includes lab work and observation, resulted in about 4.5% of patients receiving blood transfusions during surgery, whereas for those relying on the new device, only 0.6% required extra blood. The device also reduced the amount of blood used on average.

It is estimated that transfusions during surgery cost $1.9 million annually in the United States.

Mobile health apps see weak adoption rates

As health data begin to populate mobile phones, a new study from the Pew Research Center suggests that mobile health applications are accessed more by younger cell phone users than by their older counterparts.

The survey, “Mobile Health 2010,” was conducted in association with the California HealthCare Foundation, according to an InformationWeek article.

Among the study’s findings are that cell phone users between ages 18 and 29 are more likely than older mobile phone owners to use mobile health apps: 15% do so, compared with 8% of cell phone users aged 30–49. African-American cell phone owners are more likely than other groups to use such apps: 15% do so, compared with 7% of white and 11% of Latino cell phone users. Urban cell phone owners are also more likely than those who live in suburban or rural areas to have a mobile health app on their phone.

The report lists several health-related applications that can be accessed using a mobile phone, including apps for:

- Counting calories and nutrition information
- Logging fitness workouts
- Monitoring vital signs
- Calculating disease risks
- Measuring body mass index
- Keeping personal health records
- Providing health information to physicians and emergency workers
- Learning about medicines

New on the net

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About the Author

John Martin is the editor of InformationWeek. He is a veteran technology writer and editor who has covered the field for more than 30 years. He is the author of numerous books, including "The New Economy: A Guide to Creativity in Business" and "The Digital Divide: How Information Technology Is Creating Two Americas - One Rich, One Poor."
Focus: Obesity resources

This month, Medicine on the ‘Net reviews focus on two important health concerns that are linked to one another: obesity and diabetes. As the number of obese Americans rises, so does the number of diabetics. Researchers speculate that the more fat tissue a person has, the less sensitive that person becomes to insulin.

If you’re looking for statistics, you’ll want to visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) website (www.cdc.gov). It contains a significant amount of data, including county-specific diabetes and trends by state, race/ethnicity, and children and adolescents.

According to the CDC, 34% of adults age 20 and older are obese, and 34% of adults age 20 and over are overweight (and not obese). According to the American Diabetes Association, 8% of the population has diabetes.

The Obesity Society website (www.obesity.org) is a great place to begin your research into the topic of obesity. The site contains statistics, answers to FAQs, abstracts, and helpful fact sheets on topics such as “Obesity and Diabetes.”

The Endocrine Society also offers valuable obesity information through its Obesity in America site (www.obesityinamerica.org). We chose the site because it contains information on the key scientific trends and advancements related to obesity and weight loss.

A number of obesity resources are described and reviewed in the following pages, as listed in the index below, using the five-star system to rate each on content, interface, and style.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

www.cdc.gov

Ratings: Content: ***** Interface: ***** Style: *****

The CDC is a federal agency of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The CDC provides the public with reliable health information, such as data and statistics, diseases and conditions, emergencies and disasters, environmental health, healthy living, travelers’ health, and workplace safety.

You can navigate this website using the Health & Safety Topics navigation links in the middle of the home page. You can also access featured content on the site’s home page, such as news articles, event information, and publications. Click the A–Z Index links in the top left-hand side of the page to access information on obesity and overweight.

Key features of this site include:

▶ Definitions for overweight and obesity
▶ Obesity data and statistics, including information about county-specific diabetes and obesity prevalence, and overweight trends by state, race/ethnicity, or children and adolescents
▶ Information regarding the causes and consequences of obesity, including the health and economic consequences
Definitions of childhood overweight and obesity
Trends in childhood obesity
A list of contributing factors to childhood obesity
Consequences of childhood obesity
Information regarding state-based programs
Online tools and resources
Links to online resources, such as Spanish mass index calculators
Publications
Links to related topics on the CDC site

Unique elements: The site contains nutrition resources for health professionals. You’ll find the link to this information under the Related Topics heading on the left-hand side of the page.

Comments: The site is available in Spanish.
Cost: Free.
RSS XML link: Visit www2c.cdc.gov/podcasts/rss.asp for a complete list of feeds.

Keywords: obesity, overweight, weight control, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, CDC.

National Cancer Institute
www.cancer.gov

Established in 1937, the National Cancer Institute (NCI) is part of the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. NCI’s main responsibilities include coordinating the National Cancer Program, conducting and supporting cancer-related research, training physicians and scientists, and disseminating information about cancer.

You can navigate this site using the top-level navigation links. The site also has a list of quick links on the left-hand side of the page that will display frequently requested content. You can also click on links on the site’s home page to access featured content, such as information regarding types of cancer and cancer topics. To access information regarding obesity, enter the term in the search field and view the results.

Key features of this site include:

- A definition of obesity
- Information regarding the complexities of energy balance and cancer
- A Q&A fact sheet that summarizes research on the potential link between obesity and cancer risk
- Studies
- Research updates
- A fact sheet about research on the role of physical activity in reducing cancer risk
- News articles
- Clinical trials resources
- Cancer statistics

Unique elements: The content on the site explores the possible relationship between cancer and obesity and offers solutions to those who may be concerned.

Comments: The site is available in English and Spanish.
Cost: Free.

Keywords: obesity, overweight, weight control, cancer, National Cancer Institute, NCI, National Institutes of Health, NIH.

National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute
www.nhlbi.nih.gov

The National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute (NHLBI) works to promote the prevention and treatment of heart, lung, and blood diseases. It is one of the National Institutes of Health (NIH).

You can navigate this site using the top-level navigation links. You can also click on links on the site’s home page.
to access featured content, such as information about the organization, information for the public and healthcare professionals, and news articles. To access information regarding obesity, click the “Search the Diseases and Conditions Index” link on the home page under Public. From there, select Overweight and Obesity.

Key features of this site include:

» A description of the terms “overweight” and “obesity”

» An overview of the conditions, including other conditions that they put patients at risk for

» The outlook for patients who are overweight or obese

» Causes for obesity in patients, such as inactive lifestyles, environment, genes and family history, and health conditions

» Information regarding the diseases and conditions that overweight and obesity put patients at risk for, such as coronary heart disease, high blood pressure, stroke, metabolic syndrome, and cancer

» Risk factors for adults and children

» Signs and symptoms associated with the conditions

» How physicians diagnose adults, children, and teens

» Information about the specialists involved in the care of patients with weight conditions

» Prevention advice

» Information regarding treatment options, such as lifestyle changes, calorie reduction, healthy eating plans, physical activity, behavioral changes, medications, and surgery

» A list of key points related to overweight and obesity

» Links to additional resources

Unique elements: The site contains a Podcast Page that contains information about heart, lung, and blood diseases and sleep disorders. Click the button within the Overweight and Obesity section to access them.

Comments: The site is available in Spanish.

Cost: Free.

RSS XML link: http://hp2010.nhlbihin.net/joinhin/xml/rss-20.xml

Keywords: obesity; overweight; weight control; National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute; NHLBI; National Institutes of Health; NIH.

 Obesity in America
www.obesityinamerica.org

Ratings: Content: ***** Interface: **** Style: ****

The Obesity in America site is a creation of The Endocrine Society and The Hormone Foundation. The site serves as a clearinghouse for those looking for information on the key scientific trends and advancements related to obesity and weight loss.

You can navigate this site using the top-level navigation tabs, some of which expand to reveal additional drop-down menus. You can also click on links on the site’s home page to access featured content, such as news articles and recent studies.
Key features of this site include:
» Recent research study findings
» An “ask the expert” feature, including a list of topics that the experts can speak about
» Obesity-related statistics
» Information about obesity-related diseases
» Information about treatment options, including medication and surgical options
» Myths and facts related to obesity
» A Find an Endocrinologist lookup tool
» Patient success stories
» An online body mass index calculator
» News articles

Unique elements: The site links to The Hormone Foundation’s Patient Fact Sheet collection.

Comments: The site contains a glossary of terms related to obesity.

Cost: Free.

RSS XML link: http://vocuspr.vocus.com/vocusPr30/Publish/518746/obesity.xml

Keywords: obesity, overweight, weight control, The Endocrine Society, The Hormone Foundation, Obesity in America.

The Obesity Society
www.obesity.org

Ratings: Content: ***** Interface: **** Style: ****

The Obesity Society is a scientific society that studies obesity. The society encourages research on the causes and treatment of obesity and works to keep the medical community and the public informed about new advances. The society’s mission is “to advance the science-based understanding of the causes, consequences, prevention, and treatment of obesity in order to improve the lives of those affected by creating the leading professional society in the field.”

You can navigate this site using the left-hand navigation links. You can also click on links on the site’s home page to access featured content, such as abstracts and news articles.

Key features of this site include:
» Information about the society, including its council, committees, sections, etc.
» Access to the society’s newsletter
» Award and grant information
» Meeting information
» Online access to Obesity, the society’s journal
» A calendar of events
» A jobs board
» Information about upcoming education opportunities
» Certification information
» News articles
» Abstracts
» Answers to FAQs
» Links to additional resources
» Statistics
» Videos on topics such as “Hungry for Progress—Appetite, Genes, and Drugs”

Unique elements: The site contains fact sheets on topics such as “What is Obesity?” “Obesity and Diabetes,” “Obesity and Cancer,” and “Childhood Overweight.”

Comments: The site contains an Obesity Information section aimed at consumers.

Cost: The majority of information on the site is free, with certain areas restricted to members only. To learn more about membership, click the Join link under the Members heading on the left-hand side of the page.

RSS XML link: None.

Keywords: obesity, overweight, weight control, The Obesity Society.

Society for Women’s Health Research
www.swhr.convio.net

Ratings: Content: ***** Interface: **** Style: ****

The Society for Women’s Health Research (SWHR) is a national nonprofit organization that leads research on sex differences and works to improve women’s health through advocacy,
education, and research. The organization brings attention to diseases and conditions that affect women uniquely.

You can navigate this website using top-level navigation links. Some of the links expand to reveal a drop-down menu containing links to additional sections. You can also access featured content on the site’s home page, such as news articles and event information. To access the obesity information on the site, select Education, click Fact Sheets, then click Obesity.

Key features of this site include:

- Definitions of obesity
- A list of the various categories that fall under obesity, based on a person’s body mass index
- Information about the effects of life stages, such as pregnancy, and metabolic hormones on obesity
- Information regarding the effects of fat distribution on obesity
- Information regarding obesity’s effect on comorbidities, such as osteoarthritis, asthma, and cardiovascular diseases
- Content related to the neural mechanisms of appetite and satiety
- Information regarding diet, exercise, and surgical interventions and their effectiveness

Unique elements: If you enjoy reading about obesity on this site, you’ll likely want to peruse the other topics it has to offer, such as its fact sheet on breast cancer.

Comments: The site contains a wealth of statistics related to obesity in women.

Cost: Free.

RSS XML link: None.

Keywords: obesity, overweight, weight control, Society for Women’s Health Research, SWHR.

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**Weight-control Information Network**

*win.niddk.nih.gov*

**Ratings:** Content: **** Interface: **** Style: ****

The Weight-control Information Network (WIN) is an information service of the National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases (NIDDK) and the National Institutes of Health (NIH). It was established in 1994 to provide the public, health professionals, the media, and Congress with science-based information on obesity, weight control, physical activity, and nutritional issues.

You can navigate this site using the top-level navigation links. You can also click on links on the site’s home page to access featured content, such as resources aimed at African-American women.

Key features of this site include:

- Publications on nutrition, physical activity, and weight control
- An online newsletter called *WIN Notes*
- Promotional flyers
- Research updates from NIH, NIDDK, and links to information from Medline Plus
- Statistics related to obesity and being overweight
- Nutrition monitoring statistics
- Links to additional resources

Unique elements: The site contains a number of informative publications, including titles such as “Active at Any Size,” “Energize Yourself and Your Family,” and “Medical Care for Obese Patients” (aimed at healthcare professionals).

Comments: The site contains information in English and Spanish.

Cost: Free.
RSS XML link: None.

Keywords: obesity, overweight, weight control, National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases, NIDDK, National Institutes of Health, NIH, Weight-control Information Network, WIN.

WomensHealth.gov
www.womenshealth.gov

Ratings: Content: ***** Interface: **** Style: ****

The National Women’s Health Information Center (NWHIC) is a service of the Office on Women’s Health (OWH) in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. OWH was established in 1991 to “provide leadership to promote healthy equity for women and girls through sex/gender-specific approaches.” The NWHIC offers free women’s health information on more than 800 topics through its call center and its WomensHealth.gov website.

You can navigate this site using the left-hand navigation links. Some of the links expand to display additional menus. You can also click on links on the site’s home page to access featured content, such as health tools, statistics, and news. To access the obesity information on the site, click Health Topics, Fact Sheets A–Z, then select Overweight, Obesity, and Weight Loss.

Key features of this site include:

» Statistics related to the number of women in the United States who are overweight or obese
» How to tell if you are overweight or obese
» Information regarding the causes for someone being overweight or obese
» Information regarding the health effects of obesity
» Weight loss advice

» How to make healthier food choices
» Information about being physically active
» Information regarding medications approved for long-term treatment of obesity
» Surgical options for obesity
» Links to additional resources
» Links to related topics within the website, such as Heart Healthy Eating
» A printable one-page summary on overweight, obesity, and weight loss

Unique elements: The site contains information to help women who want to improve the eating habits and physical activity levels of their children.

Comments: The site contains information in Spanish and English.

Cost: Free.

RSS XML link: None.

Keywords: obesity, overweight, weight control, National Women’s Health Information Center, NWHIC, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office on Women’s Health, OWH, WomensHealth.gov.

World Health Organization
www.who.int/topics/obesity/en

Ratings: Content: ***** Interface: **** Style: ****

The World Health Organization (WHO) is the directing and coordinating authority for health within the United Nations. It provides leadership on global health matters, shapes health research agendas, sets norms and standards, releases evidence-based policy options, and monitors and assesses health trends.

You can navigate this website using the navigation links on the left-hand side of the page. You can also access featured content on the site’s home page, such as news articles, key WHO information, podcasts, and more. To access the obesity-related information on the site, select Health Topics, then navigate to Obesity.

Key features of this site include:

» Answers to FAQs about obesity
» A multimedia presentation about an obese child facing the risk of a number of chronic diseases
» Country-by-country statistics on obesity levels
» Links to related information on the site, such as diet and physical activity as well as nutrition
» Publications on obesity, nutrition, diet, and physical activity
» The WHO Child Growth Standards
» Information regarding WHO programs and activities

Keywords: obesity, overweight, weight control, World Health Organization, WHO.

Yale Rudd Center for Food Policy & Obesity
www.yaleruddcenter.org
Ratings: Content: **** Interface: **** Style: *****

The Yale Rudd Center for Food Policy & Obesity is a nonprofit research and public policy organization that works to improve the world’s diet, prevent obesity, and reduce weight stigma. It also serves as a research institution and resource clearinghouse.

You can navigate this site using the top-level and left-hand navigation links, some of which expand to reveal additional drop-down menus. You can also click on links on the site’s home page to access featured content, such as fact sheets and news articles.

Key features of this site include:
» Information about the organization
» A Hot Topics section that lets users quickly access content within the site on topics such as sugar-sweetened beverage taxes
» A blog
» Podcasts on topics such as “Connecting Eating Disorders and Obesity Prevention”
» Links to policy briefs and reports
» Information about food policy and obesity legislation filed by states and by Congress
» Event information
» News articles, such as one about pushing fruits and veggies with junk food tactics

Unique elements: The center has a presence on a number of social networking tools, such as Facebook and Twitter.

Comments: Users can opt to receive the site’s newsletter by clicking the Newsletter link in the left-hand navigation menu.

Cost: Free.
RSS XML link: http://yaleruddcenter.org/frontburner.rss
Keywords: obesity, overweight, weight control, food policy, Yale Rudd Center for Food Policy & Obesity.
Focus: Diabetes resources

The American Association of Diabetes Educators (www.diabeteseducator.org) has a site that you may not think of visiting; however, it contains a wealth of information on the condition. Key features include practice guidelines, position statements, white papers, and self-care handouts for patients.

The American Diabetes Association (www.diabetes.org) is a familiar face when it comes to diabetes information. Its site is a little rough around the edges, however—it appears to be in the midst of a redesign. You can still access information such as online risk assessments, message boards, and an online food advisor tool.

Lastly, the federal government’s National Diabetes Education Program site (ndep.nih.gov) works to promote the messages and materials of public health campaigns that target those with diabetes or those at risk. Its search tool lets users find publications based on their age, diabetes status, ethnicity/race, and language.

A number of diabetes health resources are described and reviewed in the following pages, as listed in the index below, using the five-star system to rate each on content, interface, and style.

Our site-rating system

***** Excellent
**** Very Good
*** Good
** Fair
* Adequate

Index: Diabetes resources

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American Association of Diabetes Educators
www.diabeteseducator.org

Ratings: Content: ***** Interface: **** Style: *****

The American Association of Diabetes Educators (AADE) is an association of healthcare professionals who integrate self-management into the care of people with diabetes and related chronic conditions.

You can navigate this site using the top-level navigation links. Some of the links expand to reveal additional drop-down options. You can also click on links on the site’s home page to access featured content, such as news articles and event information.

Key features of this site include:
» Information about the organization
» Practice guidelines
» Position statements and white papers
» Self-Care Behaviors handouts for patients
» Videos and guidebooks for patients
» Education resources
» Physician resources
» Definitions of commonly used diabetes terms
» Fact sheets
» Education programs
» Research updates
» Journal and newsletters
» Policy and advocacy information
Unique elements: The site contains video presentations about the Diabetes Initiative from the American College of Physicians and ACP Foundation.

Comments: The site contains a Find a Diabetes Educator lookup tool.

Cost: The majority of information on the site is free, with certain areas, such as the Member Center, reserved for members only.

RSS XML link: None.

Keywords: diabetes, blood glucose, insulin, diabetes educators, American Association of Diabetes Educators, AADE.

American College of Physicians
diabetes.acponline.org

Ratings: Content: ***** Interface: **** Style: *****

The American College of Physicians (ACP) is a national organization of internists. Members include internists, internal medicine subspecialists, and medical students, residents, and fellows.

You can navigate this site using the top-level navigation links. You can also click on links on the site’s home page to access featured content, such as news articles and publications. To access the site’s Diabetes Portal, click Patients & Families and click the Visit the ACP Diabetes Portal link on the right-hand side of the page. You can also click the Diabetes link on this page.

Key features of this site include:
» Online tools
» Workbooks
» Information for at-risk populations

Unique elements: The site contains video presentations about the Diabetes Initiative from the ACP and ACP Foundation.

Comments: The site contains podcasts from physicians and patients.

Cost: Free.

RSS XML link: Visit http://www.acponline.org/feeds for a complete list of feeds.

Keywords: diabetes, blood glucose, insulin, American College of Physicians, ACP.

American Diabetes Association
www.diabetes.org

Ratings: Content: ***** Interface: *** Style: ****

The American Diabetes Association (ADA) works to prevent and cure diabetes and to improve the lives of those affected by the disease. The organization funds research, delivers services, provides information, and advocates on behalf of patients.

The site appears to be in the midst of a redesign. For now, you can navigate it using the links on the home page, some of which expand to reveal additional menu options. You can also click on links on the site’s home page to access featured content, such as news articles and event information. Use the Top Diabetes Topics quick links on the home page to access information on topics such as blood glucose, insulin, and insurance.

Key features of this site include:
» Information about the various types of diabetes, including type 1, type 2, gestational, and prediabetes
» An online risk assessment test
» Symptoms associated with the disease
» Prevention advice
» Tips for managing diabetes
» Information for the newly diagnosed patient
helps diabetes patients understand the importance of managing their heart health.

You can navigate this site using the top-level navigation links. You can also click on links on the site’s home page to access featured content, such as news articles and links to frequently accessed content. To access the site’s diabetes information, click Conditions and select Diabetes.

Key features of this site include:
» A 12-week plan to help patients change their outlook on diabetes and manage their condition
» A free Reach Your Goals Guide
» Information about diabetes
» Diabetes symptoms
» How physicians diagnose patients with diabetes
» Information about monitoring the condition
» Information about the link between heart disease and stroke and diabetes
» Prevention and management advice
» Information to help patients understand their risk for getting diabetes
» Treatment options, such as adopting a healthy lifestyle and medications
» Personal stories
» Recipes
» Online tools, such as quizzes
» Diabetes news

Unique elements: The site contains an online assessment called My Diabetes Health Assessment that helps users learn their 10-year risk and ways to lower it.

Unique elements: The site contains an online food advisor to help users plan their meals.

Comments: The site is available in English and Spanish.

Cost: Free.

RSS XML link: None.

Keywords: diabetes, blood glucose, insulin, American Diabetes Association, ADA.

American Heart Association
www.heart.org

Ratings: Content: ***** Interface: ***** Style: *****

The American Heart Association (AHA) works to build healthier lives free of cardiovascular diseases and stroke. It
**Centers for Disease Control and Prevention**  
**www.cdc.gov/diabetes**

Ratings: Content: ***** Interface: ***** Style: *****

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is a federal agency of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The CDC provides the public with reliable health information, such as data and statistics, diseases and conditions, emergencies and disasters, environmental health, healthy living, travelers’ health, and workplace safety.

You can navigate this website using the Health & Safety Topics navigation links in the middle of the home page. You can also access featured content on the site’s home page, such as news articles, event information, and publications. Click the A–Z Index links in the top left-hand side of the page to access the site’s Diabetes Public Health Resource. The CDC’s Division of Diabetes Translation translates diabetes research into daily practice to help understand the impact of the disease, influence health outcomes, and improve access to healthcare.

Key features of this site include:
- Basic information about the disease
- Answers to FAQs
- Prevention tips
- Education resources
- Information about state and federal projects and programs
- Data and trends regarding the disease
- Fact sheets, reports, brochures, and other helpful publications
- Information regarding special populations and diabetes, such as women, children, older adults, and others who are particularly at risk
- News articles
- Podcasts

**Diabetes.com**  
**www.diabetes.com**

Ratings: Content: ***** Interface: **** Style: *****

Pharmaceutical company GlaxoSmithKline developed the content on the Diabetes.com site. It contains information to help patients manage their diabetes.

You can navigate this site using the top-level navigation links. You can also click on links on the site’s home page to access featured content, such as an online quiz and patient stories.

Key features of this site include:
- An online quiz that helps patients and their physicians determine where the patients need diabetes management support

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residents, and medical students. The information on the site has been written and reviewed by physicians and patient education professionals.

You can navigate this site using the top-level navigation links. You can also click on links on the site’s home page to access featured content, such as online tools, videos, and health tips. To access information regarding diabetes, visit Conditions A–Z on the home page, select D, then click any of the numerous diabetes-related topics to learn more.

Key features of this site include:

- Information about diet and exercise
- The link between diabetes and heart disease
- Information about diabetes during pregnancy
- Information about diabetes medications
- How to assess your risk for getting the condition
- Blood tests that physicians use to manage diabetes
- Eye care information for diabetics
- Foot care concerns
- How caregivers can help a loved one who has diabetes
- Basic information about insulin
- How to monitor your blood sugar level
- A description of the various types of diabetes

Unique elements: The site contains information about many diabetes-related conditions, such as diabetic nephropathy.

Comments: The site contains information in English and Spanish.

Cost: Free.

RSS XML link: None.

Keywords: diabetes, blood glucose, insulin, Diabetes.com, GlaxoSmithKline.

Ratings: Content: ***** Interface: ***** Style: *****

FamilyDoctor.org is a website operated by the American Academy of Family Physicians (AAFP). The academy represents more than 93,700 family physicians, family practice
National Diabetes Education Program
ndep.nih.gov

Ratings: Content: ***** Interface: **** Style: ****

The National Diabetes Education Program (NDEP) is a federally funded program sponsored by the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and the CDC. NDEP and its partners promote the messages and materials of national,multicultural public health campaigns targeting people with diabetes or people at risk of diabetes.

Unique elements: Users can search for appropriate publications using a tool that lets them specify their age, diabetes status, ethnicity/race, and language.

Comments: The site contains information in English and Spanish.

Cost: Free.


Keywords: diabetes, blood glucose, insulin, National Institutes of Health, NIH, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, CDC, National Diabetes Education Program, NDEP.

National Diabetes Information Clearinghouse
diabetes.niddk.nih.gov

Ratings: Content: ***** Interface: **** Style: ****

The National Diabetes Information Clearinghouse (NDIC) is an information service of the National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases (NIDDK), which is part of the National Institutes of Health (NIH). It was established to increase knowledge and understanding about diabetes among patients, healthcare professionals, and the public.

You can navigate this site using the top-level navigation links. You can also click on links on the site’s home page to access featured content, such as news articles and publications. Use the Diabetes Topics drop-down menu on the left-hand side of the home page to access popular content.

Key features of this site include:

» Publications on a variety of topics, such as “The Road to Health” and “Take Care of Your Heart”
» PowerPoint presentations
» Fact sheets
» Public service announcements

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resources. Click the Diabetes Topics link on the left-hand side of the home page to access popular content.

Key features of this site include:

» An A–Z list of topics and titles that are associated with diabetes
» Information for the newly diagnosed
» An introduction to the various types of diabetes
» Information about how children are affected by diabetes
» Information about pregnancy-related diabetes and how to manage it
» Information about treatment options for diabetes, including diet, medication, and complementary and alternative medical therapies
» Financial information for diabetics
» Information about the various complications associated with diabetes, including heart disease, diabetic retinopathy, and kidney diseases
» A series of PDFs that focus on how to keep diabetes under control
» Diabetes statistics for adults, children, and specific populations
» Clinical trials resources
» Awareness and prevention information that can be used for health fairs and other venues (topics include titles such as “Pre-diabetes: What You Need to Know”)
» Links to additional resources

Unique elements: The site contains a dictionary of diabetes terms.

Comments: The site and its publications are available in Spanish and English.

Cost: Free.

RSS XML link: None.

Keywords: diabetes, blood glucose, insulin, National Diabetes Information Clearinghouse, NDIC, National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases, NIDDK, National Institutes of Health, NIH.

National Institute on Aging

www.nia.nih.gov

Ratings: Content: **** Interface: **** Style: ****

The National Institute on Aging (NIA) is one of the National Institutes of Health (NIH). The organization leads a scientific effort to understand the nature of aging and to extend the healthy, active years of life. It supports and conducts research, fosters research development, and communicates information to the scientific community, healthcare providers, and the public.

You can navigate this site using the top-level navigation links. You can also click on links on the site’s home page to access featured content, such as publications and research information. To access the diabetes information on the site, select Publications, then click Conditions and Diseases, and select Diabetes In Older People—A Disease You Can Manage.

Key features of this site include:

» A description of the disease
» Information about the types of diabetes as well as prediabetes
» Symptoms associated with the disease, such as thirst, fatigue, and weight loss
» Information about tests for diabetes, such as random glucose tests and the A1C blood test
» Information about managing diabetes
» News articles
» Links to clinical trials
» Links to additional resources

Unique elements: The site contains tips to help patients manage diabetes.

Comments: The site contains links to other age-related conditions.

Cost: Free.

RSS XML link: None.

Keywords: diabetes, blood glucose, insulin, aging, National Institutes of Health, NIH, National Institute on Aging, NIA.
As one of the National Institutes of Health, the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute (NHLBI) works to promote the prevention and treatment of heart, lung, and blood diseases. For the past five years, it has sponsored a national movement named “We Can!” (Ways to Enhance Children’s Activity & Nutrition). The campaign gives parents, caregivers, and communities advice to help children age 8–13 maintain a healthy weight before obesity becomes an issue.

This free site is available in both English and Spanish. You can navigate it using the navigation links on the left side of the page. (The links at the top of the site are for the NHLBI home page.) You can also click on links to featured content on the site’s home page, such as news articles, nutrition advice, and limiting video, computer, and television time.

Key features of this site include:

» Information about the We Can! campaign
» Information regarding health problems linked to obesity, such as heart disease, high blood pressure, diabetes, certain cancers, and other chronic conditions
» Advice on choosing family-friendly foods, such as those that are low in fat and sugar, relatively low in calories, nutrient dense, and great to eat anytime
» Advice on how to limit fat and sugar in your diet
» Information regarding portion distortion and serving sizes, including advice for eating out
» How to read a nutrition facts label
» A description of what a healthy weight is
» Information on how to calculate body mass index for both children and adults
» How to balance food and activity to help maintain a healthy weight
» How to keep the weight off in the long term
» Physical activity guidelines from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
» How to make an activity plan to build in more active time during the week
» Advice on spending family time being active and tips for getting active
» Advice on how to limit the amount of screen time that children get, such as using a screen time log
» Podcasts on topics such as “Healthier Eating While Saving Money,” “Planning a Picnic?” and “Use a Trip to the Farm to Spark a Healthy Change”
» Links to local resources
» Campaign materials, including progress posters, tip sheets, and marketing documents

The site is unique in that it contains many helpful online tools, such as tracking sheets, training, curricula and toolkits, and links to social networking tools.

It also contains information for healthcare professionals who work with obese children or those at risk of becoming obese. To access this information, click on the For Health Professionals link in the left-hand navigation menu.