

A GUIDE FOR READERS

The Merck Manual Home Health Handbook is organized into sections and chapters. Understanding this organization will help the reader navigate through the book and find the most information. Topics of interest may be quickly located by consulting the Contents or Index.

Sections

The first section—Fundamentals—covers many general topics important to health care, such as making the most of health care, prevention of disease and disability, exercise and fitness, rehabilitation, and death and dying.

Most sections cover the disorders of one organ or organ system, such as those of the eye, skin, or heart and blood vessels. A few sections cover one type of disorder, such as hormonal disorders or infectious diseases. Four separate sections cover health issues specific to men, women, children, and older people.

The Injuries and Poisoning section includes first aid, burns, fractures, sports injuries, poisoning, and bites and stings, among other topics. The last section—Special Subjects—provides an overview of clinical trials, medical decision making, imaging tests, hospital care, surgery, complementary and alternative medicine, medicinal herbs, and travel and health, as well as other topics.

Chapters

Most chapters begin with a brief introduction, which contains background information relating to all the topics in that chapter. Some chapters describe a single disorder. Other chapters cover a group of related disorders. In either case, the discussion of a disorder usually starts with a definition. If the topic is lengthy, then the definition is followed by summary bullets. The information that follows is typically organized under headings, such as causes, symptoms, diagnosis, prevention, treatment, and prognosis. Bold-faced type within the text indicates topics of major importance. For ease of reading, text bullets are frequently used.

In sections about disorders of an organ or organ system, the first chapter describes the organ's normal structure and function. Reading about how the heart works or looking at illustrations of the heart, for example, may make reading about a specific heart disorder more understandable. Many sections also include a chapter describing symptoms and relevant medical tests.

Information on Aging

Many topics contain a “Spotlight on Aging” to address specific aging-related information. In addition, a section called Older People's Health Issues covers such topics as health care coverage for older people, long-term care, coping with changes related to aging, driving, and falls, among others.

Cross-references

Throughout the book are cross-references that identify other important or related discussions of a topic. Some cross-references point the reader to a figure, sidebar, or table.

Medical Terms

Medical terms are often provided, usually in parentheses after the common term. On the next page is a list of prefixes, roots, and suffixes used in medical terminology. This list can help take the mystery out of medicine's multisyllabic vocabulary.

Figures, Sidebars, and Tables

The many figures, sidebars, and tables help explain material in the text or give additional, related information. The reader can also refer to the 8 pages of full-color anatomical drawings to locate different parts of the body and see how they related to each other.

Drug Information

The Drugs section provides comprehensive information about drugs. Also, scattered throughout the book are many drug tables, marked by an Rx symbol. These drug tables provide additional information about a class or group of drugs.

Individual drugs are almost always referred to by their generic name rather than by their brand or trade names. Appendix III contains a table of the generic drugs mentioned in the book along with some of their corresponding trade names. Appendix III also provides a separate table of drug trade names with their corresponding generic name.

Drug doses are not provided because doses can vary greatly, depending on individual circumstances. For example, doses are affected by age, sex, weight, height, the presence of more than one disorder, and the use of other drugs. Therefore, health care practitioners tailor the dose of a drug to the individual.

Diagnostic Tests

Diagnostic tests are mentioned throughout the book. Usually, an explanation is provided the first time a test is mentioned in a chapter. On page 2034, the chapter on Common Imaging Tests gives detailed information about computed tomography, magnetic resonance imaging, radionuclide scanning, as well as other imaging tests. In addition, Appendix II lists many common diagnostic tests and procedures and explains what they are used for.

Did You Know

A feature called "Did You Know?" provides interesting tidbits of information related to a specific topic. Hundreds of such boxes are scattered throughout the book.

Resources for Help and information

Appendix IV lists the contact information for many organizations that help people who have specific disorders. These organizations can provide additional information about a disorder or help locate support services.