

# FOREWORD

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The previous edition of *The Merck Manual* celebrated our 100th anniversary and an illustrious history of providing information to health care practitioners around the world. With this new edition, we are implementing the changes necessary to ensure that *The Merck Manual* meets your information needs through the next century. Your needs have changed, and so *The Merck Manual* must change.

Today, readers want to find what they are looking for quickly and hone in on specific topics. Yet, readers want a complete resource containing all the information needed, now or later. Because the generation of new medical information occurs rapidly, a book too quickly becomes out of date. *The Merck Manual* can no longer wait five years to appear with updates. The revolution has arrived, and with it, *The Merck Manual* starts a new chapter in its history.

In 1899, Merck published a 192-page reference called *Merck's Manual of the Materia Medica*, which later became known as *The Merck Manual of Diagnosis and Therapy*. That book was printed and bound, distributed to users, and ultimately rewritten and published as a 2nd edition a few years later. More editions followed at intervals of two to 12 years, making the advances in medical care all the more apparent for the time lag between editions. If that lag were proportional to the speed at which medical care advanced, one edition would have followed the next more and more quickly, with intermittent bursts of editions as antibiotics were discovered, open heart surgery perfected, and computer-assisted imaging studies developed. Today, important progress in medical care is made continually; old information is potentially dangerous information; lag time in distributing information is unacceptable. The book must change or die.

This edition of *The Merck Manual* has been organized and structured to help you find what you want more easily. The index is complete and detailed. Information has been separated even more clearly into separate entities describing pathophysiology, etiology, symptoms and signs, diagnosis, prognosis, treatment, and prevention. A summary of key points introduces every major discussion. While you can use this new edition to browse and read through topics at your leisure, it will now be even more useful to look up what you want and get the information you need quickly.

The edition of *The Merck Manual* printed and bound here is as up-to-date as a printed book can be. While it is the 18th edition, more importantly it is the 2006 edition. It was reviewed and finalized just before printing. However, over the months after its release, it will become out-of-date. Of course, the vast majority of information in it will be correct and relevant to health care practitioners for many years. Yet, in some areas of practice, new information will become available. As quickly as possible, we will update that information on our web site at [www.merckmanuals.com](http://www.merckmanuals.com), available to all free of charge.

That electronic source of *The Merck Manual* will be more up-to-date than this printed one. Electronic publishing makes such a process possible, even if it robs the book of some of its allure. The web site is an electronic resource, however, providing none of the charm and comfort of a printed volume. Almost certainly, such complaints were targeted at Guttenberg by the scribes who asserted that books were works of art rather than mass-produced, utilitarian objects. The book changed, and we are grateful that it did.

At some time in the near future, we will print a new edition of the content of *The Merck Manual* and bind and distribute it as a book. It will be the printed edition of the up-to-date content of our web site. We will do so for all those who cherish holding a book in their hands, leafing through its pages, folding back its corners, and scribbling in its margins. We hope that those who enjoy such pleasures will remain a sizeable number for a long time to come.

We hope this edition of *The Merck Manual* will serve as an aid to you, our readers, compatible with your needs and worthy of frequent use. We thank the many hundreds of contributors who have poured their knowledge into this volume. Suggestions for improvements will be warmly welcomed and carefully considered.

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