

# PREFACE

---

In this, the “information age,” an interested reader can easily locate information on everything from movies to medical care. When it comes to health and disease, however, the *quality* of information is vital. A reader should ask: Is the information I have found correct, reliable, and up-to-date? Is it complete, or has it left out something vital? Does the information reflect proven science or only the opinion of the writer? Is the writer an expert in the area? Does the writer have good credentials? These questions are not trivial. If information about health care is wrong, the reader who relies on it risks grave harm.

*The Merck Manual of Medical Information—Home Edition* (Second Edition) aims to meet the growing demand of the general public for highly detailed, complete, authoritative medical information. The book covers many difficult medical concepts, but it does so in everyday language.

This 2nd edition is more than a revision of the 1st edition. It has been completely rewritten. The authors and editors of the 2nd edition have updated every topic, added many new ones, improved explanations, added more illustrations, and expanded captions to provide more information.

*The Merck Manual of Medical Information—Home Edition* was not the first home medical book. Many fine books have been published during the last two decades to meet the needs of the public for more medical information. However, *The Merck Manual of Medical Information—Home Edition* covers more topics in greater detail than all other home medical books. The book explains what a disorder is, who is likely to get it, what its symptoms are, how it is diagnosed, how it might be prevented, and how it can be treated. Information about prognosis, including what can and cannot be done, is given when possible. Background information that helps readers understand disorders is provided. This information includes anatomy, function, diagnostic tests, and medical procedures, to name a few. Medical terms are defined, so that people can better understand their doctors.

*The Merck Manual of Medical Information—Home Edition* is based on the world’s most widely used textbook of medicine, *The Merck Manual*. Millions of health care professionals worldwide rely on *The Merck Manual*. Published for more than 103 years, it is now in its 17th edition. The 2nd edition of *The Home Edition* covers almost all the topics included in the 17th edition of *The Merck Manual*. Like all of The Merck Manuals, *The Home Edition* is published on a not-for-profit basis by Merck Research Laboratories, a division of Merck & Co, Inc.

The strength of *The Merck Manual of Medical Information—Home Edition* lies in the knowledge, experience, and judgment of its more than 300 outstanding authors, consultants, and editorial board members. Their names are listed on the pages that follow the table of contents. They deserve a degree of thanks that cannot be adequately expressed here.

Readers are urged to spend a few minutes reviewing the Guide for Readers on page xxxv. The index, which is comprehensive, is usually the best way to locate specific information.

No book can replace the expertise and advice of health care professionals who have direct contact with a patient. *The Home Edition* is meant to

supplement that relationship, not replace it. This book is not meant for self-diagnosis or self-treatment. Rather it is a source of accurate, reliable information that should stimulate better communication between patients and their doctors, nurses, pharmacists, therapists, and other health care professionals. We hope that you use this book in good health and welcome your comments and suggestions.

Mark H. Beers, MD  
*Editor-in-Chief*

---

### **Special Note to Readers**

The authors, reviewers, editors, and publisher have made extensive efforts to ensure that the information is accurate and conforms to the standards accepted at the time of publication. However, constant changes in information resulting from continuing research and clinical experience, reasonable differences in opinions among authorities, unique aspects of individual situations, and the possibility of human error in preparing such an extensive text require that the reader exercise judgment when making decisions and consult and compare information from other sources. In particular, the reader is advised to discuss information obtained in this book with a doctor, pharmacist, nurse, or other health care practitioner.

---