

# A Breviloquent Study on Internet Derived Information Obstruction Treatment (IDIOT) Syndrome

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## Abstract

## Review Article

The current digital era, where everyone has easy access to a smartphone, laptop, or tablet, caused a fulminant increase in the rise of Internet Derived Obstructing Treatment (IDIOT) syndrome. The Internet Derived Information Obstructing Treatment (IDIOT) syndrome or Cyberchondria occurs when patients abruptly quit their treatment because they have blindly trusted internet medical information. The rapid increase in internet use in the current digital era has caused a potential increase in anxiety, and a person either self-medicates or abruptly stops the drug for his medical illness, thereby the rise in the Internet Derived information Obstructing Treatment (IDIOT) syndrome. WHO calls this an Infodemic, which has created a complex situation in healthcare, as it has caused too much information in digital and physical environments during an outbreak of the disease and caused mistrust in health authorities. Patients must not merely believe healthcare related information available from online health resources and must seek the help of licensed healthcare professionals for their health concerns. There must be an increase in the awareness programs among the public to as not to fall as victims and blindly follow or abruptly stop their medical prescriptions for their medical illness from available online health resources.

**Keywords:** Cyberchondria, Syndrome, IDIOT, Infodemic, Healthcare, Digital, Anxiety.

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## INTRODUCTION

Looking for information about symptoms and illnesses on the Internet is common and often serves useful purposes. However, a number of people who are overly distressed or anxious about their health perform excessive or repeated health-related searches on the Internet, only to become more distressed or frightened - a pattern defined here as cyberchondria. The internet has become a major source of information for people, especially when it comes to health. But this has caused a potential increase in anxiety leading to a person self-medicating or stopping certain drugs they've been prescribed for a medical illness. Receiving health diagnoses and medication information from online sources has led to the rise of a condition called IDIOT syndrome. The IDIOT syndrome or cyberchondria is an internet related phobia brought on by the use of online health information. In this, a person is excessively or unreasonably fearful about contracting a specific illness [1,4].

IDIOT (internet-derived information obstructing treatment) syndrome is one of the biggest challenges that has been raised from our digital dependency. People suffering from IDIOT syndrome google out their symptoms, self-diagnose and start treatment without consulting a doctor or some people google out the medicines prescribed by doctors and start checking their uses and side effects and then discontinue the treatment without realising that a single medicine has numerous uses and doctor knows best what a patient needs. World Health Organisation (WHO) calls this situation an "infodemic (excessive availability of both correct and misleading health-related information affecting people's ability to make the right healthcare decision). According to doctors, there is now a shift from ignorance affecting treatment-seeking to excessive information affecting treatment-seeking. People have become Google doctors. They blindly trust medical information available on the internet as they lack the skill to distinguish scientific facts from myths. Many people develop extreme health anxiety after searching their symptoms on the internet where even a minor itching is shown to be linked to skin cancer; thus, fuelling the

apprehensions or sometimes it goes the other way around; we undermine the seriousness of the health issue because somewhere on google we read it's a common issue that goes away on its own and thus we take it for granted. IDIOT syndrome or cyberchondria affects educated people more as they are more digitally dependent.

The use of the Internet as a primary source for medical information has become common practice. A 2010 poll revealed that 88% of Internet users in the United States have searched for medical information online and 62% of users searched for such information in the past month [5]. Increased access and use of these tools can result in individuals feeling relief and empowerment [6] or fear and heightened arousal [7]. Individuals who experience increased arousal when viewing online medical information may be at risk for developing cyberchondria, a phenomenon in which repeated Internet searches regarding medical information result in excessive concerns about physical health [8].

The current digital era, where everyone has easy access to a smartphone, laptop, or tablet, caused a fulminant increase in the rise of Internet Derived Obstructing Treatment (IDIOT) syndrome. Internet Derived Information Obstructing Treatment (IDIOT) syndrome occurs when patients abruptly quit their treatment because they have blindly trusted internet medical information. Patients get important health information online and anticipate additional assistance. Doctors are becoming sick because of stress, and they need to take care of their health. There is an added demand to acquire communication skills rather than merely technical and professional qualities [1,4]. The WHO defines this infodemic as too much information during a disease outbreak, including inaccurate or misleading information in digital and physical surroundings. It leads to uncertainty and risk-taking behaviors that are harmful to health. Additionally, it diminishes the public health response and fosters mistrust of health officials. Both advantages and disadvantages come with using the internet for medical information. The advantage of using the internet for medical information is that it can facilitate informed conversations with medical professionals and enable the early detection and treatment of dangerous conditions. However, some people also have the chance to stop their

drug for their medical illness due to the increased anxiety it causes, thereby making it possible for them to fail and seriously jeopardize the patient's health. Many people self-diagnose their conditions after conducting online research and treating themselves before seeing a doctor. According to the IAMAI (Internet and Mobile Association of India) and data analytics firm Kantar ICUBE 2020 research, the number of active internet users in India is projected to grow from its current level of 692 million users (351 million users from rural India and 341 million users from urban India) in 2021 to 900 million in 2025, an increase of 45% [2,4].

### Signs and Symptoms of IDIOT Syndrome

Those suffering from IDIOT syndrome can manifest a state of severe medical anxiety, which can lead to highly harmful actions. The main characteristics of cyberchondria (Fig. 1) include the individual's uncertainty about having a serious illness despite having few or no (EMADS) symptoms, which includes the following: E: Excessive time spent online looking for information. M: Mistrust of medical experts whose opinion could be sought in person. A: An undesired and compulsive search for knowledge. D: Distress brought on by the search behavior, such as anxiety and panic. S: Looking for assurance from a reliable source or person [3,4]. Following are some of the most common signs of this syndrome.

1. Strong uncertainties about having a serious illness despite having minor symptoms.
2. Spending hours of compulsive, unwanted online search for medical information.
3. Feeling worried about having one or more serious illnesses.
4. Feeling distressed due to the information found online.
5. Experiencing sweating, an accelerated heart rate, or other anxiety related symptoms while surfing online.
6. The habit of jumping to the worst possible conclusions about the existing health status.
7. Believing everything the internet has to say about various diseases, illnesses, or symptoms.
8. Mistrust of medical professionals whose advice could be obtained in person.
9. Need to seek assurance from a dependable source.



**Fig. 1: Characteristics of IDIOT Syndrome or Cyberchondria**

### Effects of IDIOT Syndrome

Lots of people rely on the internet to look for information about symptom ratification, precautions, medicines, disease manifestation, and even long-term cures. However, it lacks authenticity and discernment. This means that although you would come across a list of symptoms that sound like yours, one needs to consider other factors such as family and personal history to make a correct diagnosis. Doctor internet doesn't have this ability either. Therefore, online searching for symptoms can quickly transform into false diagnoses and lead to even more intensive browsing, resulting in waves of anxiety. Searching for information on the internet based on your symptoms can be pretty bad for your emotional state and increase your health anxiety. Whenever you look up a disease on the internet, the list of possible symptoms that come up is often fairly common and overlaps with multiple problems, which may have nothing to do with your health. Furthermore, people are self-medicating based on the information they find through internet searching, which interferes with their treatment and can make the situation potentially dangerous.

On the internet, there is a variety of accurate and reliable information about health and wellbeing, and information on any other subject on the internet is the same in this regard. Some websites post fictitious health information merely to attract users, sponsors, and ratings. People should be wary of websites that build hype while endangering their readers. Such websites ought to be avoided. Numerous trustworthy websites offer clear, accurate fundamental medical information that eventually directs their visitors to seek expert medical assistance. Additionally, there are numerous instances

where readers have changed their naive perspective about their health thanks to online medical literature. This has made a significant difference in preventing health issues [3,5].

### How to Deal with IDIOT Syndrome?

Following are some coping strategies that work well against IDIOT syndrome:

- 1. Avoid Self-shaming:** Many of those suffering from IDIOT syndrome feel ashamed or uncomfortable about their habit of believing the worst about their health. This further deteriorates their anxiety and increases their physical, stress-related symptoms. Therefore, one must self-deprecate for feeling anxious about their health. While these fears can be a little difficult to share and understand, they are still valid.
- 2. Practice Relaxation Techniques:** Practising self-taught relaxation techniques such as deep breathing exercises, muscle-tension relaxation exercises, and guided imagery to relieve anxiety.
- 3. Challenge Negative Thoughts:** Remind yourself that not all the information on the internet is true and that you don't have the skills and knowledge to interpret the information correctly. Use self-analysis to get rid of negative thoughts.
- 4. Consult with a Doctor:** If you can't seem to get your anxiety and fears under control, consult with a doctor right away. It is always wise to get a medical opinion rather than jumping to the worst possible conclusions.

Our digital dependency in general and IDIOT syndrome, in particular, is fuelling the online marketing of counterfeit drugs. We take online buying of medicines

like buying other merchandise online. We don't realise that if we buy a substandard bag or dress it will just cost us money but if we take counterfeit drugs it may put our life at stake. We get tempted by the online heavy discounts on medicines and other healthcare gadgets like digital BP apparatus and glucometers. It is high time that we become mindful of the risks involved in being a Google doctor. We should rely on credible medical professionals only. We should do an intensive survey of the e-commerce site before buying medicines online. We should use our wit not to get lured by the heavy discount offers. Doctors and medical associations should disseminate information among the public regarding authentic and fake healthcare portals. We should get our digital health care devices like glucometers etc. checked by professionals before blindly using them as one wrong reading is enough to put a patient's life at stake. Authorities should make the public aware of proxy indicators that can help them in making the right decision; for e.g. briefing the public about not relying on sites offering medicines without prescriptions. Above all stringent legislation and its thorough implementation should be ensured. Adherence to Drug control laws and policies should be sought from e marketers too.

## CONCLUSION

The use of the Internet as a primary source for medical information has become common practice. Searching for health information online has become increasingly common. In the case of IDIOT syndrome, there is a growing demand for public education on what, where, and how to look up a diagnosis and a cure online. The expectations of patients and their caregivers have grown as a result of the rapid advancement of technology. When patients rush to the hospital with inflated expectations of the medical staff, the doctors are overburdened. The demand for doctors and nurses to work nonstop is getting worse every day. Given the burden on doctors, they need to take care of their own health, and many have had challenges with their health and are getting sick due to stress. There is a greater lack of trained workers because many people have become unwell and have not returned to work. Don't fall victim to the IDIOT syndrome is our counsel. An increase in the awareness of IDIOT syndrome is essential among

patients who take self-medication, as medicines are accessible from nearby pharmacies by searching medical information from online health resources. People must refrain from searching for medical information through the internet and must seek the help of licensed health care professionals for their medical health problems.

**Conflict of Interest:** Authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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