

Relying on Dr. Google to diagnose eye problems may be dangerous to your health

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A study examining the diagnoses generated by WebMD Symptom Checker showed the online tool was correct only 26 percent of the time. And the recommendation for the top diagnosis was often inappropriate, at times recommending self-care at home instead of going to the

emergency room. The research will be presented today at AAO 2018, the 122nd Annual Meeting of the American Academy of Ophthalmology. The researcher suggests ophthalmology-related symptom checkers have an inherent limitation because most eye diseases and conditions require an in-person examination.

Lead researcher Carl Shen, M.D., an ophthalmology resident at McMaster University in Canada, was inspired to conduct the study by his [patients](#), who often come to appointments with an incorrect self-diagnosis or preconceived notions about their condition. He wants to help patients better understand and interpret the eye health information they find online.

To conduct the study, both medical and non-medical personnel input 42 clinical scenarios into the popular WebMD Symptom Checker. Results were then compared with the known diagnosis. The top diagnosis returned was correct in just 26 percent of cases. While the correct diagnosis did appear within the top three results 40 percent of the time, it wasn't even an option in 43 percent of the cases.

The assessment of symptom severity was also often incorrect. In 14 of 17 cases, the online symptom checker made incorrect recommendations about what the patient should do next, such as self-care at home or getting immediate treatment.

While WebMD can arrive at the correct clinical diagnosis, a significant proportion of common ophthalmic diagnoses are not captured, Dr. Shen concluded.

"Sometimes doing research online can be helpful in identifying possible conditions, and it's good to be an informed patient," Dr. Shen said. "But it's also true that often these online symptom checkers do not arrive at the [correct diagnosis](#). And the wrong recommendation on what to do

with that [diagnosis](#) could be dangerous. The technology used in these online symptom checkers still have a long way to go in terms of accuracy."

Provided by American Academy of Ophthalmology

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