



POV: GOOGLE ENHANCES HEALTH
INFORMATION IN SEARCH RESULTS

FEBRUARY 2015

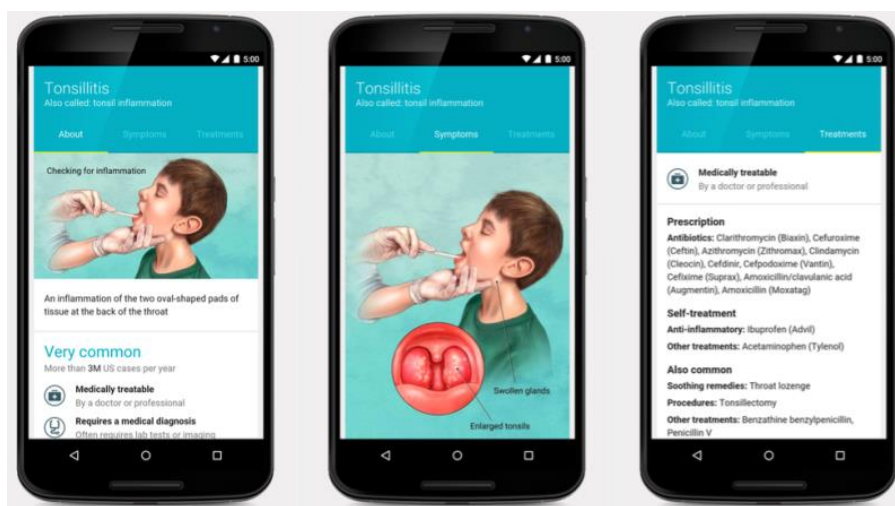


INTERACTIVE HEALTH INFORMATION MADE AVAILABLE IN GOOGLE SEARCH RESULTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

On Feb. 10, Google announced that search results for health-related queries will receive enhanced information in the knowledge graph. As of Feb. 11, a search for a health condition such as “tonsillitis” returns an interactive module that includes a revised and expanded knowledge graph section with a condition overview, symptoms, treatment options and more.

The knowledge graph module is located to the right of search results on desktop computers and above search results on mobile devices. This POV provides details about the update and its implications for pharmaceutical digital marketers.



WHAT IS THE GOOGLE KNOWLEDGE GRAPH?

In their announcement, Google stated that [one in 20 Google searches](#) is for health-related information. According to [Statistic Brain](#), there were more than 2 trillion Google searches in 2014, so it's safe to say Google plays an important role in providing health information to the world. Until 2012, the information it provided came only in the form of links to other sites, but that year, Google began displaying information from sources such as Wikipedia and the National Library of Medicine on the right side of desktop search results in a module known as the [knowledge graph](#). The goal of knowledge graph information is to provide quick, simple answers without requiring the user to navigate to another website. Until this 2015 update, the knowledge graph had limited information and included several links to other websites providing detail on the searched topic.



ABOUT THE ENHANCED SEARCH RESULTS

To improve the quality of health content in search results, Google partnered with doctors, medical illustrators and the Mayo Clinic to collect pertinent information, including symptoms, treatments and demographics. Doctors from Google and the Mayo Clinic reviewed and verified the collected data.

This update is currently available in the United States for English queries on more than 400 conditions, but it will extend outside the U.S. and eventually cover an expanded list of conditions. There is no official list of the conditions with enhanced information, but Google says it has started with the most commonly searched ailments, such as “the common cold” or “frostbite.”

“An average of 11 doctors have vetted each fact, and all (of the 400 conditions) were then reviewed by the Mayo Clinic,” Amit Singhal, Google's vice president in charge of search, told **USA TODAY**. “And this is just a start.”

KEYWORDS THAT TRIGGER THE KNOWLEDGE GRAPH

The Intouch search and inbound marketing team tested a number of conditions and keywords to determine which queries triggered the enhanced knowledge graph. The team found that only the disease name, such as “**crohn's disease**,” and small variations, triggered the enhanced information. A longer keyword variation, such as “**crohn's disease in children**,” did not return the knowledge graph. In some cases, adding the word “symptoms” or preceding the condition with “what is” still triggered knowledge graph.

INFORMATION INCLUDED IN THE KNOWLEDGE GRAPH

While variations exist, there are commonalities among the new knowledge graph results. The module is always broken into three clickable tabs:

1. About
2. Symptoms
3. Treatments



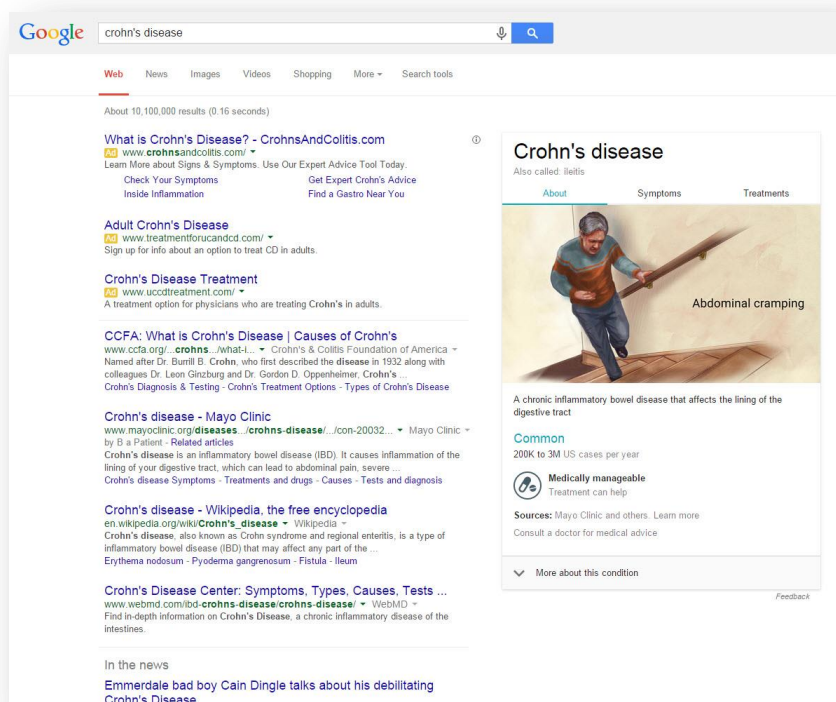
The default About tab is the most general of the three and contains some or all of the following information:

- + A brief overview of the condition, including its duration, treatability and contagion
- + Illustration
- + Prevalence
 - Google uses similar criteria as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). For example, a "very rare" condition is one with fewer than 20,000 cases a year in the U.S.
- + Typical ages of people with the condition
- + Which gender is more often affected

Some information displays with charts and icons to make it easily digestible. At the bottom of the expandable module is a link to the condition page on the Mayo Clinic website, as well as a link to information about the knowledge graph itself.

The Symptoms tab is second and lists common symptoms associated with the condition, often grouped into categories. These categories often include "Pain," followed by common pain sites, or symptoms grouped by anatomical system, such as gastrointestinal symptoms. Google also classifies whether the condition requires a medical diagnosis or if it is self-diagnosable (as with frostbite). This appears to be determined by whether the condition requires testing or imaging to confirm. In some cases, a second medical illustration is provided on this tab.

Lastly, the Treatments tab provides:





- + Common prescriptions used to treat the condition
- + Other medical treatments, including therapies, surgeries and devices
- + Helpful lifestyle changes
- + Ways to prevent the condition
- + Types of medical specialists who can consult on the condition

The Treatments tab is of particular interest to pharma marketers. Both branded and generic prescription treatments are listed and often grouped by drug type, such as antibiotic or steroid. Lifestyle changes listed often include dietary recommendations.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE KNOWLEDGE GRAPH

Information this interactive, with its relatively large images, is unprecedented for Google search results, especially on desktop computers. It's hard to predict exactly how users will react to the enhanced knowledge graph results. Some possible implications for pharma companies include the following:

- + Higher engagement with the knowledge graph could mean fewer clicks on organic or paid links for applicable searches.
- + Users may use the information to self-diagnose; depending upon the knowledge graph's popularity, this could increase the incidence and rapidity of self-diagnosis.
- + Users may use the information to learn more about the condition immediately after diagnosis.
- + The Treatments tab may provide treatment options to users, including a list of the various possible treatments available.
- + Patients may review treatment information in the knowledge graph tab rather than seeking details from a brand.com site.
- + Due to Google's vetting process, it is unclear how rapidly informational changes, such as newly approved treatments, would be added to knowledge graph results.
- + As the knowledge graph continues (and likely expands), it's possible that Google may choose to associate with additional prestigious institutions besides the Mayo Clinic.

It's important to keep in mind the unique patient journey associated with each medical condition. Often, potential patients search symptoms such as "joint pain" early in their research. **High-level symptom searches do not currently trigger the knowledge graph result, which provides an important opportunity for pharma companies to provide relevant information to users.** Patients typically search for



a condition by name further in their journey, after a diagnosis has been given or when vetting out possible self-diagnoses.

STRATEGIES TO CONSIDER

Patient journeys and marketing challenges are unique for each condition and brand, meaning that pharma companies need to develop tailored approaches on a case-by-case basis. In some cases, little may need to be done to account for the update, and performance may not see a sizeable impact. In others, a different approach to content creation and search engine optimization may need to be applied. To begin, however, here are a few recommended approaches:

- + Create detailed disease awareness content beyond the basic facts Google provides, including content focused on the needs of earlier-stage information seekers
- + Monitor click-thru rates and impressions for PPC ads served for trigger keywords
- + Create content that discusses unique symptoms or symptom combinations for the medical condition
- + Consider testing revisions to meta data, such as page titles and descriptions, to appeal to patients looking for in-depth information
- + Consider the implications for healthcare professionals (HCPs): it may encourage self-diagnosis, which can be frowned upon by HCPs. Brands may work to offer HCPs educational materials that can help them work with patients to clarify or expand upon the knowledge graph information

Whether or not the new knowledge graph has an impact on a specific website's performance, these tactics are always good ideas for reaching engaged patients. Creating in-depth content benefits multiple channels, including organic search, by drawing in users looking for specific information.

Google believes the new knowledge graph will make it easier for users to research. According to Greg Sterling at [Search Engine Land](#), "Google told me that it hopes this initiative will help motivate the improvement of health content across the Internet. The company also said that comparing its curated health content and that of third party sites may lead to a better understanding of which publishers offer solid information."




CONCLUSION

Google will continue to provide what it believes is the best user experience for users seeking health information. In some cases, it will provide that information itself, but will still rely on quality sites to offer in-depth content. By keeping the user in mind and implementing a solid search strategy, pharma companies can continue to provide high-quality information to help patients move forward in their journeys. The Intouch search and inbound marketing team will continue to monitor the enhanced knowledge graph's progression to determine its impact to pharma marketing efforts.


For more information and ideas about search engine optimization or this guidance, contact your Intouch Solutions representative.

The information contained in this document is for general guidance on matters of interest only. Intouch Solutions makes no representations as to the accuracy or any other aspect of information contained in linked websites. The information contained in this document is not, nor is it intended to be, legal advice.

© Intouch Solutions 2015
Author: Jerod Barlow

 **Kansas City**
913.317.9700

 **Chicago**
312.540.6900

 **New York**
646.795.3600

www.intouchsol.com
email: info@intouchsol.com
blog: intouchsoul.com
twitter: [@intouchsol](https://twitter.com/intouchsol)