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POV: GOOGLE EXPANDS HEALTH
INFORMATION FEATURES WITH MOBILE
SYMPTOM CARDS

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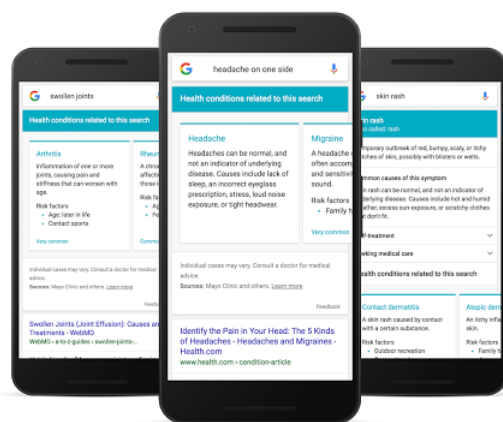


GOOGLE EXPANDS HEALTH INFORMATION FEATURES WITH MOBILE SYMPTOM CARDS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In an effort to make a massive amount of online health information easy to navigate, Google recently announced a new [symptom card feature](#) for its application and mobile search. This new feature is designed to provide high-level symptom information for general symptom search queries, such as “headache” or “knee pain.” The new symptom card update will roll out to the United States first, then Google plans to expand the number of symptoms and release the update internationally.

The symptom card will include a definition of the symptom, common causes, self-treatment options and suggestions for when to seek medical treatment. Lastly, Google included the option to read about health conditions related to the symptoms.



HEALTH-RELATED SEARCHES

Google continues to be one of the most popular platforms for people searching for health-related information. With more than [40,000 searches](#) happening each second, Google understands a few things about search intent, including health-related search intent.

THE EVOLUTION OF DR. GOOGLE

The first health-related content Google created was in partnership with the Mayo Clinic and Harvard Medical School in early 2015. That update included more than 400 [health-related Knowledge Graph modules](#). Google then expanded its health-related information to cover popular therapies when it updated its [Knowledge Graphs to include medication information](#). Now, Google's symptom cards will capture early stage search queries from users beginning their journey with symptom research.

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In 2015, Google said that [one in 20 searches](#) was health related. With the 2016 update, it said [symptom searches](#) alone made up 1% of its more than 3.5 billion daily searches — that's close to 35 million symptom searches each day. As more people continue to leverage online resources for their health-related journeys, it is not a far stretch to conceive that even more Americans conduct health-related searches today than the 80% of all Internet users the [Pew Internet & American Life Project reported](#) in 2013. Recognizing the continued demand for online health information, Google plans to retain its position as a top online health resource by positioning itself not only as a helpful place for people to start their health-related research, but as a resource used throughout the life of a user's health-related journey.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PHARMA

Google has always relied on content across the Web to pull in relevant search results for its users. However, it has departed from relying solely on third-party content and is now generating its own content in partnership with healthcare professionals. The reasoning for this shift is that its users have a difficult time navigating health content online, e.g., understanding medical jargon or searching mild symptoms only to find scary and unlikely conditions. So in order to help users avoid anxiety and stress associated with health-related information, Google continues to curate its own content and feature it within organic search results.

ORGANIC SEARCH

Google has been shifting its organic results from 10 blue links displayed first to a diverse content ecosystem for some time now. With that shift, Google moved from pointing its users to websites with answers to providing instant answers within the search results themselves. As it has focused on healthcare search queries, Google has begun to create content that answers broad questions and shares general information. Because of this, the following types of information will be even more competitive now that symptom cards exist:

1. **Definitions:** Any query done to elicit a definition or an understanding of medical terminology, e.g., “hypertension” or “what is thrombosis”
2. **Symptom searches:** Single words or small phrasal queries used for general overviews, e.g., “headache,” “fatigue” and “child with knee pain”
3. **Multi-symptom searches:** List queries used for cause identification and treatments, e.g., “headache, dizziness and fatigue”



The good news is that despite generating its own content, Google still wants to pull relevant information from other websites if it is helpful for users. For example, the search, “throbbing tooth pain” generates a featured snippet from a home remedies website.

Knowing this, we anticipate a small decrease in click-thru rates for pharma websites with a heavy focus on symptom information. Only those websites concisely communicating information with strong mobile optimizations and appropriate metadata markup will be used by Google and featured above organic results.



CONCLUSION

As Google continues to evolve its algorithm and focus on personalization, it will continue to make changes that prioritize quick access to information and rich content over standard website links in the mobile search arena. With mobile search accounting for the majority of searches done in the United States, a mobile-friendly website with strong mobile optimizations is necessary to remain relevant in the organic search landscape.

Please contact your Intouch representative to discuss how this change may impact your website, or how you can strengthen your mobile presence within Google's organic search results.

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