



Best Practices for Responding to Online Patient Reviews

 **All patient reviews are essential, even the negative ones. Learn how to build patient trust by effectively sourcing feedback, responding appropriately to reviews, and claiming your profile on [healthgrades.com](https://www.healthgrades.com).**

Did you know that [84 percent of patients](#) check online reviews before choosing a doctor? Responding to patient reviews — both positive and negative — builds a strong rapport with patients and establishes your practice as a trustworthy and reliable presence. Still, knowing how to address feedback can be tricky.

You'll want to respond to reviews directly, but not in a way that compromises your patients' confidentiality or risks a HIPAA violation. If a patient leaves a less than stellar review, you also don't want to respond with a statement that could be construed as condescending, defensive, or dismissive. It can be tempting to leave comments be and not respond, but how you navigate feedback and use it to improve quality of care and the overall patient experience distinguishes you from other physicians.

So what's the best way to interact with patients online?
Here's everything you need to know.

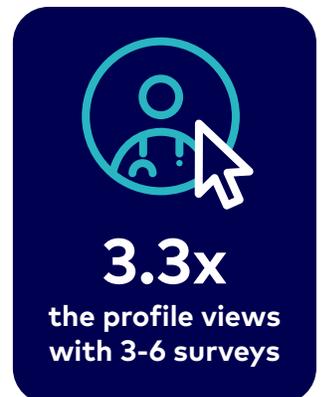
WHY DOCTORS SHOULD CARE ABOUT ONLINE REVIEWS

Today's patients are proactive — they're researching their symptoms and conditions, exploring possible treatment options, and shopping around for the physician and practice that best suits their needs. That's why managing your reputation is so important! If potential patients see that you've received more negative feedback than positive, they'll likely research another physician. However, if prospects see that you've earned a steady stream of high ratings and you regularly engage with patients who've left positive reviews on your profile, that can be the final factor that convinces a new patient to appoint.

In fact, our research shows that reviews and ratings can significantly impact how many profile views and new patient appointments you receive. A study conducted by Healthgrades revealed several notable trends among more than 14,000 profiles on healthgrades.com. When it comes to reviews and ratings, and their impact on consumer engagement:¹

- 1. Higher Review Volume Means More Engagement:** A Healthgrades analysis found that healthcare professionals with just 3-6 surveys received 3.3x the profile views, versus healthcare professionals without surveys. Healthcare professionals in the top quintile (23+ surveys) received a whopping 9.4x more profile visits!
- 2. Higher Review Volume Means a Higher Likelihood of New Patient Bookings:** Similarly, healthcare professionals with 7-12 reviews received 5x more appointment requests than doctors without reviews, and those in the top quintile (23+ surveys) received 9.7x more.
- 3. Patients Prefer a Rating of 4 Stars or More:** When considering profiles with at least 7 reviews, healthcare professionals with an average rating of 4+ stars received 17 percent more profile views than those with an average rating of 3.50 to 3.99 stars (and nearly 30% more than an average rating of below 3.49).

Did you also know that reviews can affect your online visibility and bolster your SEO strategy? If you regularly engage with reviewers and receive positive feedback from patients, Google is more likely to bump up your profile on its search list. Even if you receive some constructive criticism, responding to negative feedback and inviting patients to complete reviews, boosts SEO and demonstrates transparency and accountability — which patients are sure to appreciate.



¹Healthgrades Patient Experience Survey (PES) Impact on PDC Consumer Engagement Study, Feb. 2020

HOW TO EFFECTIVELY SOLICIT PATIENT FEEDBACK

If you're hesitant about soliciting reviews, don't be! On average, patient reviews on healthgrades.com are overwhelmingly positive — in fact, 80 percent of all reviews are 4 or 5 stars.² To foster a transparent, honest, and communicative environment with patients, make reviews a priority. Physicians should ask for feedback immediately after appointments and offer to resolve concerns in-office before the patient leaves.

You can also use Healthgrades' [Patient Engagement Resources](#) to make it easier for patients to view and post reviews on your Healthgrades profile. These resources include:

- **Review Reminder Cards:** These personalized cards encourage patients to leave feedback and double as upcoming appointment reminders.
- **Patient Review Link:** You can send patients a mobile-friendly custom survey link via post-appointment communications.
- **Star Rating Badge:** Every doctor with a Healthgrades profile can share their Star Rating Badge on their practice website and other marketing pages to promote current reviews and encourage patients to write their own.

Remember that you don't want to force a review out of your patients. Coming on too strong can make it seem like you're more interested in appearances than providing care. The goal is to provide easy, low-pressure opportunities for patients to offer honest, intentional feedback that brings value to you and your team's work and experience.



²Healthgrades analysis March 2021



TIPS FOR RESPONDING TO ONLINE PATIENT REVIEWS – BOTH POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE

Physicians and practices are limited by what they can say to patients outside of the examination room. Doctor-patient confidentiality is paramount, and the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) ensures that all medical staff [maintain this confidentiality](#). There are four violations and [penalty levels](#) your practice can incur if you're not careful and physicians should be mindful not to discuss health-related circumstances and experiences online.

Positive Reviews as an Additional Patient Touchpoint

All reviews deserve a response, even the positive ones! While it may be tempting to let glowing reviews speak for themselves, you can maximize the impact of 5-star ratings by engaging with the patients who left them. Positive reviews are more than compliments, they're additional patient touchpoints you can use to build stronger relationships and boost retention. Also, connecting with patients online shows new prospects that you're engaged and will value their inputs.

With positive reviews, your reply should be simple — thank the patient for their kind words and illustrate how much they mean to you and your team.

Negative Reviews as an Opportunity

Negative reviews, understandably, can be more challenging to respond to. Patients may draft extensive, incredibly detailed, and sometimes hurtful feedback. Negative feedback can be hard to hear, but you should never add fuel to the fire by writing a reactionary, dismissive, or combative response. When addressing patients, remember - even though the conversation is online, responding to a patient review is still interacting with a patient and must comply with the Health Insurance Portability & Accountability Act (HIPAA).

Before typing that first draft, it helps to think honestly about where the patient is coming from and reflect on how your services could have contributed to their unfortunate experience. Meet the patient at a place of understanding and thank them for taking the time to leave feedback.

Take care not to touch on sensitive information the patient may have already divulged. The best way to address concerns more personally is to offer to take the conversation offline and invite them to contact you privately. Give them a method to contact you directly. Leave a callback number, an email, or link to a contact portal to give them a way to continue the conversation.

Let's say a patient posts a lengthy 1-star review recounting their poor experience at their appointment. They allege that your office staff was rude and unaccommodating, the wait time was excessively long, and you rushed your conversation with them. While your first instinct may be to dismiss these claims as exaggerations, pause and analyze the areas the patient points out where your practice could use some improvement. For instance, if your office has trouble with internal organization and an overbooked schedule, take this review as a signal to streamline your processes.

Remember that you don't have to start from scratch when drafting a response to a review. It's common to design a general response framework, and then adjust templates as needed to fit each individual patient's concerns. Using a template also helps to reduce the risk of inadvertently violating HIPAA guidelines. Consider engaging legal counsel to review replies and help you respond in line with HIPAA requirements.



Looking for more tips on how to respond to patient reviews?
[How to Stay HIPAA-Compliant When Responding to Patient Reviews](#)

HOW HEALTHGRADES VERIFIES REVIEWS

Patient concerns and negative reviews should be taken seriously, but that doesn't mean reviewers should be able to comment online without boundaries. That's why Healthgrades uses a strict review verification process to ensure all reviews are fair. When patients complete a Healthgrades Patient Review, their responses are reviewed to ensure they're authentic and appropriate. Healthgrades first verifies the reviewer's information to confirm that the experience talked about was indeed *their* experience. After providing their email address, the patient must agree to Healthgrades User Agreement, Editorial Policy, and Privacy Policy to verify that their words are accurate, truthful, and reflect a first-hand account.

Then, the content is reviewed for explicit or inappropriate language and continuously monitored to ensure that it consistently meets editorial and confidentiality guidelines. You can also flag suspicious activity and reviews you feel are disingenuous. Having a negative review or two on your profile isn't enough to damage your reputation or your practice, as long as the good outweighs the bad. If you take the time to address negative feedback and show how committed you are to improving your quality of care, patients will respond well to your transparency. After all, patients don't expect perfection — they expect honesty, especially regarding their health.



Your Patient Reviews Can Drive Conversions with Healthgrades

60 percent of consumers searching for a doctor visit healthgrades.com to seek out physician reviews.³ Our research shows that Healthgrades physician profiles with a 3-star rating or higher see a 150 percent increase in engagement, and the converting power of gathering and responding to reviews can't go unnoticed.⁴ By claiming your doctor profile on Healthgrades, you're investing in your reputation and communicating to prospective patients that you take their opinions seriously. Start responding to feedback today to build stronger patient connections and win more referrals.

Once consumers are at the stage of weighing physician reviews, they're ready to convert. Practices, hospitals, and health systems marketers have an opportunity here to engage the largest audience of high-value, low-funnel patients searching for a doctor online. Around 67 percent of visitors to Healthgrades physician profiles schedule an appointment within a week. By advertising your health system, hospital, or large group practice on healthgrades.com, you can drive patients to your most profitable service lines with guaranteed conversions.



Get in touch today to learn more about how Healthgrades can help turn your marketing goals into real results.

³Healthgrades Impact on Consumer Engagement Study, Feb. 2020

⁴Healthgrades internal data, 2021