

## Google's AI Overview has no opt-out. That's making some people unhappy

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**Warm-Up Question:** Have you ever felt frustrated by technology that you couldn't turn off or control? What did you do about it?

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ARI SHAPIRO, HOST:

You may have noticed recently that when you ask Google Search a question, many times the first thing that pops up is a big box at the top of the feed with an answer written by AI. Well, sometimes that information is not correct, and NPR tech reporter Dara Kerr reports some people wish they could **opt out**.

DARA KERR, BYLINE: It's easy to find people **fed up with** the AI in Google Search.

SAMANTHA YE: As soon as I saw the Google AI results popping up, I was looking for ways to get rid of it.

HEATHER USSERY-KNIGHT: It just doesn't seem ready.

DANIEL KEPPLE: Basically **forcing this down our throats**, regardless of whether people like it or whether it's useful or not.

KERR: That's Samantha Ye, Heather Ussery-Knight and Daniel Kepple. Google introduced its AI tool last May. It's called AI Overview. It doesn't pop up for every search, but people say it's still frustrating. The No.1 problem? There's no way to opt out. Here's Kepple again.

KEPPLE: You can't trust it fundamentally.

KERR: Trustworthiness has been an issue with AI Overview. When Google first launched the tool, it immediately started **spouting** falsehoods and just weird ideas. It told people eating a rock a day was healthy and that adding glue to pizza would stop the cheese from sliding off. Heather Ussery-Knight describes herself as a **technophile**, but she doesn't like this technology.

USSERY-KNIGHT: If you are going to have this technology be **prevalent**, it needs to be accurate, especially right now, when we've got sort of this whole, like, alternative facts things going on.

KERR: The promise of AI is that it's able to **ingest** all of this data and pop out what is supposed to be a useful summary very quickly. The whole process takes a ton of energy, which is also a problem for people. A search with generative AI uses about 10 times the amount of energy as a typical web search. Isabelle Laun is a recent college graduate in Oregon.

ISABELLE LAUN: I really don't want to be increasing my carbon footprint by so much just by searching.

KERR: AI Overview can also lead to **unintended consequences**. Take Jennifer Hamilton. She's a family medicine doctor in Philadelphia. She says the tool is messing up the online tests that doctors like her have to take regularly. They're allowed to use the internet during these tests, but not AI because they're supposed to come up with their own answers.

JENNIFER HAMILTON: But if you're using AI, you can just copy and paste the question and get an answer without doing any thinking at all.

KERR: Other smaller search engines like DuckDuckGo also have AI, but they have an opt-out option. A Google spokesman told NPR that people find the Google AI tool helpful. He didn't answer questions about why there's no opt-out, but he said the links are still there. Patrick Hall is a teaching assistant professor at George Washington University.

PATRICK HALL: Enabling users to opt out is just a simple best practice.

KERR: Hall studies data ethics and says Google probably doesn't offer an opt-out because AI Overview is good for business. It keeps people looking at Google instead of clicking away on a search result.

HALL: It's about getting more eyes on their pages. It's about keeping the hype going around generative AI. And I think we, as consumers, are really just kind of **fodder** in this huge market coming to life.

KERR: Some people have found **workarounds**. There are third-party browser extensions, including one called Bye Bye, Google AI, and some people are just switching to other search engines. This is what Jennifer Hamilton, the doctor, really wants.

HAMILTON: I want a button where I can say, turn it off and leave it off.

KERR: Or maybe an on button that she'd never hit. Dara Kerr, NPR News.

**Vocabulary and Phrases:**

1. **Opt out:** To choose not to participate in something.
2. **Fed up with:** Tired or annoyed by something that has been happening for too long.
3. **Force (something) down our throats:** To make someone accept something even if they do not want it.
4. **Spouting:** Talking about something a lot or in a way that is meant to convince others, often without much thought or concern for accuracy.
5. **Technophile:** A person who loves or is enthusiastic about technology.
6. **Prevalent:** Commonly occurring; widespread.
7. **Ingest:** To take in information, substances, or ideas.
8. **Unintended consequence:** An unexpected or unforeseen result of an action.
9. **Fodder:** Material or ideas that can be used for a particular purpose, often in a negative sense.
10. **Workaround:** A way to overcome a problem or limitation in a system.

**Comprehension Questions:**

1. What is the main issue some users have with Google's AI Overview in their search results?
2. Why is there no option to opt out of Google's AI tool according to the report?
3. What were some of the strange or incorrect pieces of information generated by Google's AI?
4. How does the use of AI in search engines impact energy consumption?
5. What are some examples of unintended consequences mentioned in the story related to AI Overview?

**Discussion Questions**

1. Have you ever received incorrect or strange information from an online search? How did it affect your trust in the tool or platform you were using?
2. Do you think having more control over the type of content we see online, such as being able to disable AI-generated responses, is important? Why or why not?
3. In what ways do you think new technologies, like AI tools, have impacted your daily online activities or browsing habits?
4. Have you ever experienced frustration with a new technology? What was it and how did it affect you?
5. In what ways do you see AI being useful in your daily life? Are there areas where it should not be used?