A PICTURE OF

A survey of the nation's approach to everyday health and wellbeing



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Introduction

Good everyday health is important for us all as individuals, and for the nation as a whole.

This report summarises a national consumer survey, carried out by independent research organisation NOP World in May 2005, into people's experience of everyday ailments and health conditions – such as colds, headaches, allergies, indigestion and muscle aches – and how they deal with them.

The findings offer a fascinating insight into how we manage our everyday health and, in particular, show our strong preference for looking after ourselves as far as we can.

The study was commissioned jointly by Reader's Digest and the Proprietary Association of Great Britain (PAGB) in order to gain an up-to-date, objective picture of how we approach everyday health matters.

The study included some broad questions about consumers' health attitudes and behaviour, including:

- How healthy do people in Britain feel today?
- Where do we turn for information and advice about our health?

The study also investigated our experience of – and response to – everyday health conditions:

- What range of common health conditions do people experience?
- How do people deal with such conditions when they occur?
- How do people make use of health professionals like GPs and pharmacists?
- How do people view 'over-the-counter' medicines?

Both Reader's Digest and PAGB have carried out similar studies in the past and this time came together to carry out this new survey jointly.

PAGB's previous survey was carried out in 1997 by research organisation BMRB using a national sample of 2033 consumers, using home-based personal interviews. Findings from this 2005 survey are compared to those from the 1997 survey, where appropriate, although the health environment has, of course, changed a lot over the intervening period.

Aims of the survey and method

The overall objective of this survey was to assess how the general public view and manage their everyday health, how much they experience and respond to a range of specific common health conditions, and how they view and use alternative sources of health information and advice available regarding their everyday health.

It was also desired to assess how the general public's attitudes and behaviour towards management of everyday health conditions may have changed since PAGB's similar survey in 1997.

The particular question areas included:

- How people view their health and how much they worry about it
- The extent to which they take responsibility for their health
- Measures taken to stay healthy
- Sources of health information and advice used
- What everyday health conditions people experience
- How people respond to each everyday health condition
- Use of and satisfaction with GP and pharmacy
- Use of and satisfaction with 'over-the-counter' medicines
- *How people choose 'over-the-counter' medicines*

The survey was carried out on behalf of PAGB and Reader's Digest by NOP World among 1,500 members of the general public in May 2005, using a web-based questionnaire.

Respondents were invited to take part via NOP's consumer 'E-panel', a web-based research panel containing around 200,000 members.

The sample was drawn using standard UK demographic quotas, to provide an accurate representation of the population as a whole, based on gender, age, socio-economic class and TV region. An additional quota was used to select females with children under 15, who were asked about their children's experience of ailments in addition to their own.

Summary of main findings

Most people feel they are in good health but are concerned about maintaining their health. Most of us also think that being healthy is about looking and feeling good, not just avoiding an illness.

Many of us have taken note of the need to lead a healthy lifestyle. More than half of us say we regularly do vital things like try and eat a healthy diet, avoid or limit smoking, limit our alcohol intake and manage our stress levels. However, there is still a significant minority of people who hardly do any of these things, including taking some daily exercise

Almost all of us feel responsible for our own health and that of our family. We want and support the idea of 'self-care'. We prefer to look after ourselves as far as possible, but we strongly value the support of health professionals like GP and pharmacists, when we need their expertise.

We particularly prefer to deal with everyday ailments and health conditions ourselves, which we see as everyday inconveniences rather than actually being 'ill'.

We continue to regard our GP as our preferred source of health information but we also particularly value the advice of family, friends, and the pharmacist too. Newspapers, magazines, the internet and product leaflets are our next most valued sources.

When we visit our GP or the pharmacist for advice about everyday health matters, we are usually happy with the advice. However, for a significant proportion of us, it is quite rare for us actually to make such a visit, particularly to the pharmacist.

The most common everyday health conditions we experience are colds, headaches, sore throat/cough, stiffness in joints/back pain, muscle aches/pains, and tiredness. This was the same sort of picture as was found in 1997.

How we respond to an everyday ailment varies depending on what the condition is. For common 'self-limiting' conditions like colds, headaches and indigestion, most of us respond by treating the condition with an over-the-counter medicine.

With other conditions we have a higher preference for seeking professional advice rather than treating directly with a remedy. These include stiffness in joints, feeling low, arthritis, ear problems, irritable bowel syndrome and thrush/cystitis.

When we use an over-the-counter medicine, we are usually satisfied that they do the job.

When we are looking to buy one, it is our previous experience of the product that influences us the most in our selection. And more than two thirds of us would welcome a wider range of OTC medicines to help a greater range of conditions.

How do we feel about our health?

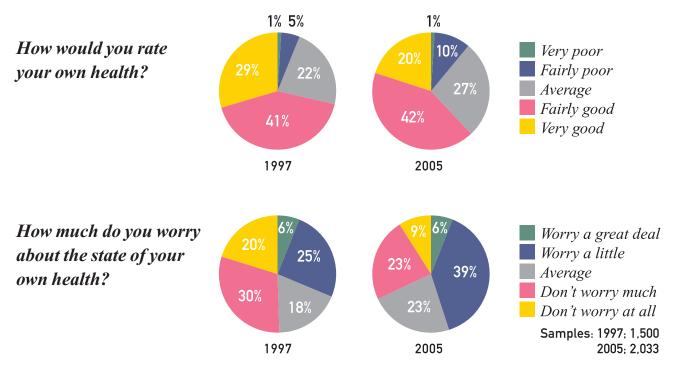
We're fine, thank you !

It's said that we're only as old as we feel. If the same goes for health, we're doing alright - but not quite as well as we were several years ago.

In 2005, most of us reckon we're in good health, with nearly two-thirds (62%) of respondents rating their health as 'fairly good' or 'very good'. Just 11% of people believed they are in poor health

By comparison, in the 1997 survey, 70% of people felt their health was either 'fairly good' or 'very good'. The proportion of people thinking their health was poor was only 6%.

As well as perceiving our health to be slightly worse, we're also worrying about it more. In 2005, 45% of people claim to worry about the state of their health 'a great deal' or 'a little', compared to fewer than one in three (31%) in 1997.



Looking after number one

When it comes to maintaining and improving our health, virtually all of us believe it's down to us as individuals. A full 96% agreed with the statement that "individuals should be responsible for their own and their family's health". And, similarly, 99% of us believe that "preventing illnesses is just as important as treating illnesses".

Only 25% of people indicated they "rely on my doctor for advising me how to stay healthy and managing my health". Slightly more men believe this than women (29% compared to 22%). Most of us (87%) say that we have to be 'really ill' before we make a visit to the doctor.

Looking good, feeling good

Most of us do not consider being healthy as simply a matter of avoiding an illness or being unwell.

80% of people in the 2005 survey agreed ('a little' or 'very much') that "being healthy is just as much about looking and feeling good as not having a medical ailment". More women than men feel this, and so do more over 65s.

When it comes to common ailments like colds, hayfever and upset stomachs, most people (87%) do not consider these as being ill, but "more part of life's everyday inconveniences". Men and women think similarly in this regard, but views do differ across age groups. Only 81% of under 25s agreed, compared to 92% for over 65s, indicating perhaps that the older we are the more willing we are to accept or put up with common health problems.

Not all of us are looking after ourselves properly

As more of us have become concerned about our health over recent years, many of us have taken note of the need to lead a healthy lifestyle.

People were asked in this survey how often they spend doing a range of ten 'healthy' actions. More than half of us nowadays say we regularly do vital things like eat a healthy diet, avoid or limit smoking, limit our alcohol and manage our stress levels. Proof that people do pick up on the messages they see in health advertising and editorial in the media.

	Every day or often	Sometimes	Never
Avoid smoking/limit how much I smoke	74%	12%	14%
Eat a healthy/balanced diet	71%	26%	3%
Limit how much alcohol I drink	68%	25%	7%
Keep stress under control	56%	38%	6%
Get enough sleep & rest	55%	38%	7%
Keep my cholesterol under control	52%	27%	21%
Manage my weight/diet	47%	39%	14%
Exercise for 15-20 mins	47%	37%	16%
Take vitamins/food supplements	36%	28%	36%
Take herbal medicines/supplements	17%	30%	53%

How often, if ever, do you do the following?

However, there is still a significant minority of people who hardly engage in any of these healthy behaviours. For example, 16% of people profess never to exercise for at least 15-20 minutes, 21% say they never try to keep their cholesterol under control, and 14% never manage their weight or diet. 5

Where do we get our health information?

The most popular sources

The survey investigated how much people make use of sixteen specific sources to get information about their health. In order of most used, the findings were:

How much, if at all, do you use the following these days to get information about your health?

	(% using 'a lot' or 'a little')
Doctor	85%
Family/friends	73%
Pharmacist/chemist	68%
Product leaflets/packaging	65%
General health websites	61%
Newspapers/magazines	61%
Nurse at GP's surgery	59%
Healthcare leaflets at pharmacies, surgery, supermarket etc	58%
TV/Radio	56%
Medical reference books	49 %
Pharmacy counter assistant	47%
Manufacturer/retailer helplines/websites	42%
NHS Direct/NHS online	33%
Alternative health practitioner	21%
NHS Walk In Centres	14%
Community nurse/midwife	12%

Over the last seven years there has been some change in the relative use of these sources, but not much.

The most popular information sources in PAGB's 1997 survey were, in order, doctor, magazines, friends/family, radio/television, newspapers, leaflets in surgery or store, pharmacist and advertising.

In 2005 we continue to value our GP as our favourite source of health information. Family and friends and magazines are also highly favoured.

What is new is the emergence of the Internet over the last few years as a very significant health information source. 61% of us turn nowadays to the Web for information or advice on health issues, which is now more popular, for instance, than TV or radio.

Different strokes

Within this overall picture of where people turn to for health information, there are, however, some significant differences across demographic groups.

For instance, compared to the overall averages:

- Over 65s and those in poor health use the doctor more
- Under 25s are higher than average users of family/friends, magazines and TV/radio
- *Fewer men use the pharmacist than women (24% vs 41%)*
- Fewer men use healthcare leaflets compared to women (35% vs 51%)
- People who worry about their health more make more use of the Internet
- Under 25s and single people use the pharmacist the least
- Lower social grades D and Es use pharmacy more
- Adults who have children under 16 use NHS Direct more
- Fewer men than women use alternative health (24% vs 41%)
- Females, under 25s and those in poor health rely on product leaflets more



What everyday ailments do we experience?

No shortage of everyday ailments to bother us

Looking at what common, everyday ailments we experience, there's a quite a range!

The survey presented respondents with a list of forty everyday 'health conditions' and asked which, if any, they had experienced in the last year.

The table opposite shows the results for all forty conditions, and also gives an indication of differences in terms of gender and age groups.

We could probably guess that the common cold and headache are at the very top of the list. Who doesn't suffer from a sniff or a brief pain in the head occasionally?

It's interesting to note that among the next most common ailments are conditions to do with general aches and pains and also tiredness, feeling low and stress. Perhaps a clear sign of the busy and demanding lifestyle many of us typically lead nowadays.

It's also interesting to note some differences between men's and women's experience.

According to this survey, higher proportions of women experience many of the conditions than men. The differences are only slight for some conditions, including the common cold, but for some other quite widespread conditions – particularly fatigue, feeling low, constipation, migraine and irritable bowel syndrome – the difference is quite sharp.

Men, for their part, are more likely to experience a hangover and athlete's foot more often than women.

Experience of 40 common health conditions, by sex and age

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Flu 20% 43% 57% 21% 20% 23% 13% 11% 13% Arthritis/rheumatism 20% 38% 62% 2% 6% 10% 19% 20% 43% Hangover 20% 54% 46% 28% 31% 24% 13% 3% 1% PMT* 18% 0% 100% 26% 29% 30% 15% 0% 0% Constipation 18% 33% 67% 17% 20% 19% 16% 14% 17% Migraine 18% 56% 44% 16% 16% 19% 14% 12% Bladder weakness/incontinence 14% 28% 72% 9% 9% 15% 18% 32% Piles 14% 52% 48% 6% 17% 20% 19% 19% Menopausal symptoms* 14% 0% 100% 1% 7% 12% 54% 24% 3% IBS 13% 29% 71% 10% 15% 13% <td>Hayfever</td> <td>23%</td> <td>47%</td> <td>53%</td> <td>21%</td> <td>24%</td> <td>23%</td> <td>13%</td> <td>9%</td> <td>10%</td>	Hayfever	23%	47 %	53%	21%	24%	23%	13%	9 %	10%
Arthritis/rheumatism20%38%62%2%6%10%19%20%43%Hangover20%54%46%28%31%24%13%3%1%PMT*18%0%100%26%29%30%15%0%0%Constipation18%33%67%17%20%19%15%11%18%Excess earwax/ear problems18%56%44%16%16%19%16%14%17%Migraine18%34%66%23%18%24%17%9%9%Cold sores/lip problems18%42%58%17%17%25%14%14%12%Bladder weakness/incontinence14%28%72%9%9%15%18%32%Piles14%52%48%6%17%20%19%19%19%Menopausal symptoms*14%0%100%1%7%12%54%24%3%IBS13%29%71%10%15%21%20%17%16%Eczema13%42%58%20%19%25%13%12%11%Thrush*12%0%100%23%28%20%12%7%10%Acne/spots12%38%62%41%21%22%9%5%2%Minor burns/sunburn10%46%54%33%24%22%9%5% </td <td>Mouth problems/ulcers</td> <td>22%</td> <td>42%</td> <td>58%</td> <td>20%</td> <td>21%</td> <td>19%</td> <td>15%</td> <td>12%</td> <td>13%</td>	Mouth problems/ulcers	22%	42%	58%	20%	21%	19 %	15%	12%	13%
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PMT*18%0%100%26%29%30%15%0%0%Constipation18%33%67%17%20%19%15%11%18%Excess earwax/ear problems18%56%44%16%16%19%16%14%17%Migraine18%34%66%23%18%24%17%9%9%Cold sores/lip problems18%42%58%17%17%25%14%14%12%Bladder weakness/incontinence14%28%72%9%9%15%18%88%32%Piles14%52%48%6%17%20%19%19%19%Menopausal symptoms*14%0%100%1%7%12%54%24%3%Athlete's foot13%60%41%10%16%27%20%16%13%BS13%29%71%10%15%13%12%11%Thrush*12%0%100%23%28%20%12%7%10%Acne/spots12%38%62%41%21%22%9%5%8%Minor burns/sunburn10%46%54%33%24%22%9%5%8%Minor eye problems9%50%50%19%10%22%17%9%23%Cystitis6%13%88%27%24%17%10%	Arthritis/rheumatism	20%	38%	62%	2%	6%	10%	19 %	20%	43 %
Constipation18%33%67%17%20%19%15%11%18%Excess earwax/ear problems18%56%44%16%16%19%16%14%17%Migraine18%34%66%23%18%24%17%9%9%Cold sores/lip problems18%42%58%17%17%25%14%14%12%Bladder weakness/incontinence14%28%72%9%9%15%18%32%Piles14%52%48%6%17%20%19%19%19%Menopausal symptoms*14%0%100%1%7%12%54%24%3%Athlete's foot13%60%41%10%16%27%20%16%13%IBS13%29%71%10%15%21%20%17%16%Eczema13%42%58%20%19%25%13%12%11%Thrush*12%0%100%23%28%20%12%7%10%Acne/spots12%38%62%41%21%22%9%5%8%Minor burns/sunburn10%46%54%33%24%22%9%5%8%Minor eye problems9%50%50%19%10%22%17%9%23%Gystitis6%13%88%27%24%17%10% <td>Hangover</td> <td>20%</td> <td>54%</td> <td>46%</td> <td>28%</td> <td>31%</td> <td>24%</td> <td>13%</td> <td>3%</td> <td>1%</td>	Hangover	20%	54%	46%	28%	31%	24%	13%	3%	1%
Excess earwax/ear problems18%56%44%16%16%19%16%14%17%Migraine18%34%66%23%18%24%17%9%9%Cold sores/lip problems18%42%58%17%17%25%14%14%12%Bladder weakness/incontinence14%28%72%9%9%15%18%18%32%Piles14%52%48%6%17%20%19%19%19%Menopausal symptoms*14%0%100%1%7%12%54%24%3%Athlete's foot13%60%41%10%16%27%20%16%13%IBS13%29%71%10%15%21%20%17%16%Eczema13%42%58%20%19%25%13%12%11%Thrush*12%0%100%23%28%20%12%7%10%Acne/spots12%38%62%41%21%22%9%5%2%Minor burns/sunburn10%46%54%33%24%22%9%5%8%Minor eye problems9%50%50%19%10%22%17%9%23%Cystitis6%13%88%27%24%17%10%9%13%	PMT*	18%	0%	100%	26 %	29 %	30%	15%	0%	0%
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Bladder weakness/incontinence14%28%72%9%9%15%18%18%32%Piles14%52%48%6%17%20%19%19%19%Menopausal symptoms*14%0%100%1%7%12%54%24%3%Athlete's foot13%60%41%10%16%27%20%16%13%IBS13%29%71%10%15%21%20%17%16%Eczema13%42%58%20%19%25%13%12%11%Thrush*12%0%100%23%28%20%12%7%10%Acne/spots12%38%62%41%21%22%9%5%2%Minor burns/sunburn10%46%54%33%24%22%9%5%8%Minor eye problems9%50%50%19%10%22%17%9%23%Cystitis6%13%88%27%24%17%10%9%13%	Migraine	18%	34%	66%	23%	18%	24%	17%	9 %	9 %
Piles14%52%48%6%17%20%19%19%19%Menopausal symptoms*14%0%100%1%7%12%54%24%3%Athlete's foot13%60%41%10%16%27%20%16%13%IBS13%29%71%10%15%21%20%17%16%Eczema13%42%58%20%19%25%13%12%11%Thrush*12%0%100%23%28%20%12%7%10%Acne/spots12%38%62%41%21%22%9%5%2%Minor burns/sunburn10%46%54%33%24%22%9%5%8%Minor eye problems9%50%50%19%10%22%17%9%23%Cystitis6%13%88%27%24%17%9%23%	Cold sores/lip problems	18%	42%	58%	17%	17%	25%	14%	14%	12%
Menopausal symptoms*14%0%100%1%7%12%54%24%3%Athlete's foot13%60%41%10%16%27%20%16%13%IBS13%29%71%10%15%21%20%17%16%Eczema13%42%58%20%19%25%13%12%11%Thrush*12%0%100%23%28%20%12%7%10%Acne/spots12%38%62%41%21%22%9%5%2%Minor burns/sunburn10%46%54%33%24%22%9%5%8%Minor eye problems9%50%50%19%10%22%17%9%23%Cystitis6%13%88%27%24%17%10%9%13%	Bladder weakness/incontinence	14%	28%	72%	9 %	9 %	15%	18%	18%	32%
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IBS13%29%71%10%15%21%20%17%16%Eczema13%42%58%20%19%25%13%12%11%Thrush*12%0%100%23%28%20%12%7%10%Acne/spots12%38%62%41%21%22%9%5%2%Minor burns/sunburn10%46%54%33%24%22%9%5%8%Minor eye problems9%50%50%19%10%22%17%9%23%Cystitis6%13%88%27%24%17%10%9%13%	Menopausal symptoms*	14%	0%	100%	1%	7%	12%	54%	24%	3%
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Thrush*12%0%100%23%28%20%12%7%10%Acne/spots12%38%62%41%21%22%9%5%2%Minor burns/sunburn10%46%54%33%24%22%9%5%8%Minor eye problems9%50%50%19%10%22%17%9%23%Cystitis6%13%88%27%24%17%10%9%13%	IBS	13%		71%	10%	15%	21%	20%	17%	16%
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Minor burns/sunburn10%46%54%33%24%22%9%55%8%Minor eye problems9%50%50%19%10%22%17%9%23%Cystitis6%13%88%27%24%17%10%9%13%	Thrush*	12%	0%				20%	12%		10%
Minor eye problems 9% 50% 50% 19% 10% 22% 17% 9% 23% Cystitis 6% 13% 88% 27% 24% 17% 10% 9% 13%	Acne/spots	12%	38%	62%	41 %	21%	22%	9 %		2%
Cystitis 6% 13% 88% 27% 24% 17% 10% 9% 13%	Minor burns/sunburn	10%	46%		33%	24%	22%	9 %		8%
	• •	-								
Travel sickness/nausea 5% 29% 71% 41% 24% 15% 7% 4% 9%		-						10%		
	Travel sickness/nausea	5%	29%	71%	41%	24%	15%	7%	4%	9%

*Women only

What everyday ailments do we experience?

Range of everyday ailments unchanged from 1990s

The sort of everyday ailments we experience today is much the same as was identified in PAGB's 1997 survey.

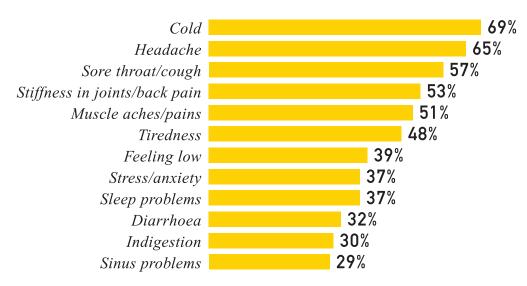
The top two most common conditions then were, likewise, the common cold and headache.

Six other conditions are also in the 'top dozen' for both years, as shown below.

These are stiffness in joints, muscle aches, tiredness, indigestion, feeling low, and sleep problems.

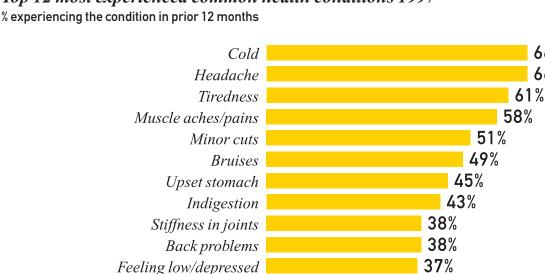
Top 12 most experienced common health conditions 2005

% experiencing the condition in prior 12 months



Top 12 most experienced common health conditions 1997

Sleeping problems



66%

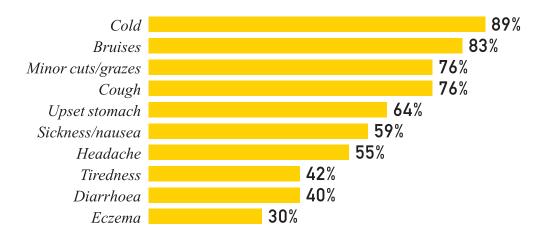
66%

36%

What about the children?

The survey asked 135 mums about how much their child had experienced ten specific common conditions in the previous twelve months. The chart below summarises the findings.

Has your child experienced any of the following conditions in the last year? % of women saying their child had experienced in last 12 months



How do we deal with everyday ailments?

What do we actually do when we experience one of the forty common conditions referred to in the previous section? Do we seek professional help, take something for it, or do nothing and wait for the problem to go away/resolve itself?

The answer, it seems, is that it all depends on what the condition is. Our response varies depending on how much we feel we know about the condition and whether we feel we need extra information or advice from a health professional like a GP or pharmacist.

The table opposite summarises, for forty common health conditions, how respondents said they responded to each condition. Whether they sought professional advice, whether they treated the condition themselves (normally with an over-the-counter medicine), or they did nothing.

Conditions principally dealt with by self-treatment

Generally, these are traditionally well-known 'self-limiting' conditions that arrive, are a nuisance for a short while, and then after use of a 'tried and tested' treatment, go away or are relieved to become 'manageable'.

Such conditions include: colds, headache, sore throat, indigestion, hayfever, mouth ulcers, athlete's foot, flu, and migraine.



How everyday ailments were treated on the most recent occasion

	Sought advice	Treated condition	Did nothing
Acne/spots	15%	59%	31%
Arthritis/rheumatism	39%	52%	14%
Athlete's Foot	9%	81%	11%
Back/joint pain or stiffness	24%	49%	29%
Bladder weakness/incontinence	25%	30%	48%
Blocked nose/sinus problems	14%	64%	25%
Catarrh/chest congestion	23%	61%	20%
Cold	3%	71%	27%
Cold sores/lip problems	6%	81%	14%
Constipation	10%	61%	30%
Cystitis	46%	56%	10%
Diarrhoea	9%	55%	37%
Eczema	32%	67%	7%
Excess ear wax/ear problems	35%	51%	21%
Fatigue/tiredness	13%	33%	56%
Feeling low/depressed/blue	24%	29%	50%
Flu/virus	30%	68%	7%
Hangover	0%	60%	40%
Hayfever	14%	75%	16%
Headache	2%	86%	13%
IBS	37%	40%	27%
Indigestion/heartburn	13%	73%	17%
Insomnia/sleep problems	17%	32%	53%
Menopausal symptoms	22%	40%	39%
Migraine	13%	80%	9%
Minor burns/sunburn	3%	80%	19%
Minor cuts/grazes	1 %	71%	28%
Minor eye problems	43%	42%	21%
Mouth problems/ulcer	5%	69%	26%
Muscular aches/pains	15%	57%	31%
Period pains	4%	69%	28%
Piles/haemorrhoids	16%	53%	33%
PMT/PMS	8%	48%	46%
Skin rash/allergies/irritated skin	28%	61%	16%
Sore throat/cough	8%	78%	16%
Stress/anxiety	19%	31%	52%
Thrush	34%	63%	10%
Toothache/teeth problems	53%	33%	19%
Travel sickness/nausea	3%	55%	42%
Upset stomach	6%	60%	35%

Totals may add to more than 100% as individual may follow more than one course of action

How do we deal with everyday ailments?

Conditions with high referral to health professional

Of the range of conditions investigated in the survey, those for which people had a higher preference for seeking professional advice included: stiffness in joints/back pain, feeling low/depressed, skin rashes, toothache/teeth problems, flu/virus, catarrh/chest infection, arthritis/rheumatism, ear problems, irritable bowel syndrome, eye problems, thrush and cystitis.

Clearly, several of these conditions may be longer-lasting than a quick cold or simple headache, or possibly less understood by consumers, so they prefer to seek advice rather than just self-treat. If people are unsure or concerned if a condition could be more serious, they will, understandably, consult a health professional.

The GP is overwhelmingly the particular health professional that people turn to, if they seek medical advice. Other people call upon the GP practice nurse or the pharmacist. However, some people, consult members of their family or friends. *(Please refer to table on page 6.)*

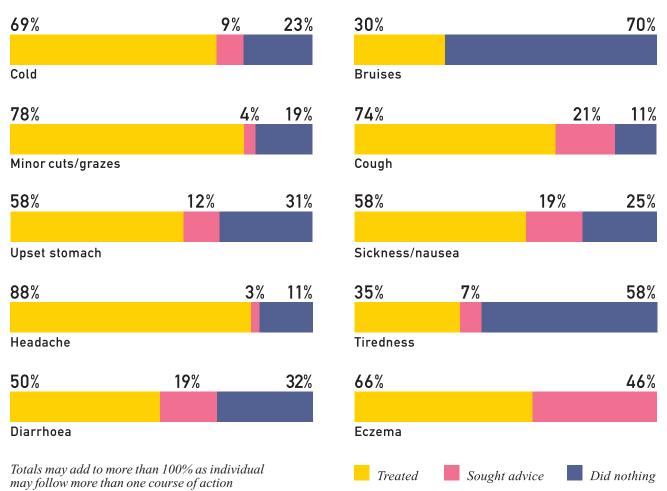
Conditions with higher rate of 'did nothing'

These include: muscle aches, fatigue, feeling low, stress, diarrhoea, upset stomach, hangover, bladder weakness, premenstrual tension, menopausal symptoms and travel sickness/nausea.

The main reasons identified in the survey for people choosing to do nothing were that they thought the condition would go away by itself, they thought the problem was not troubling enough, or they believed the condition could not be treated with anything.

What about the children ?

The diagram below shows specifically how mums said they responded to ten common conditions experienced by their child.



It is interesting to note the high proportion of mums whose response was to use a treatment as opposed to seeking professional advice or do nothing. Where advice was sought, the most often used source was the doctor or nurse at the GP surgery and this was most commonly for eczema and common cold. In fact, not a single mum questioned 'did nothing' in response to eczema flare-up.

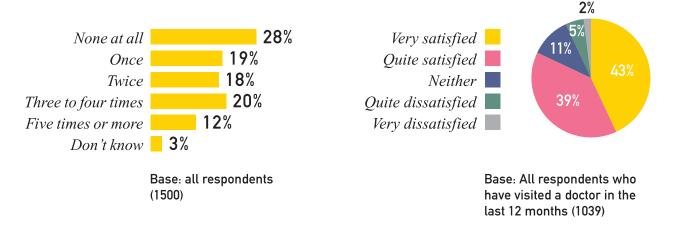
What do we think of the professionals?

Doctors

Our GP plays a crucial role in our thinking about health. Not only do we consider the GP as our leading source of healthcare advice, virtually all of us are registered with an NHS doctor.

Yet, not many of us actually make a frequent visit to the GP. To some, it's more a case of we know our GP is there, in case we need him/her for something serious.

How many times in the last year, if any, have you visited your doctor to discuss your or your child's general health or how to treat a common health problem? From the last visit to your doctor to discuss general health or a how to treat a common health problem, how satisfied were you with the advice or information given?



On average, we make about two visits a year to see the doctor to discuss our general health or how to treat a common health problem, with just a third of us (32%) visiting three or more times a year. Those of us in poor health and over 65 are, not surprisingly, more likely to attend surgery than the national average.

More than a quarter of us (28%) haven't visited our GP at all in the last year to discuss our general health or a common health problem. The rate is slightly higher among men compared to women (33% vs 24%).

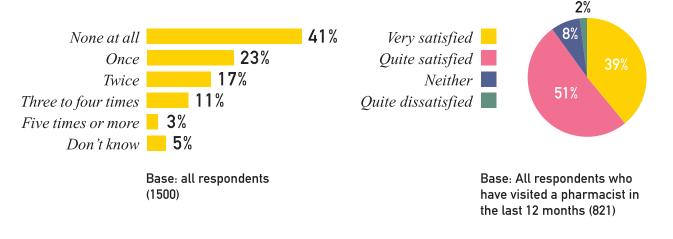
When we do visit the GP, we're generally satisfied -43% very much so, and a further 39% quite satisfied. Interestingly, satisfaction is higher among men than women, suggesting that women expect more than men from their doctor.

When we're at the surgery, 71% of us would also be happy to discuss everyday health matters with the practice nurse, rather than having to see the doctor.

The pharmacist

Fewer of us visit the pharmacist/chemist than the GP to discuss our general health or how to treat a common health problem. Just 55% of respondents in this survey indicated they had visited a chemist for this purpose in the last year, which is much lower than the corresponding figure of 69% for GPs.

How many times in the last year, if any, have you visited a pharmacist/ chemist to seek advice or information about your general health or how to treat a common health problem? From the last visit to a pharmacist/ chemist to discuss general health or a how to treat a common health problem, how satisfied were you with the advice or information given?



14% of us have visited a pharmacy three or more times in the last year to discuss an everyday health issue, but four out of 10 have not called upon a chemist at all for this purpose, rising to nearly half (48%) of all men (the figure for women is just 34%).

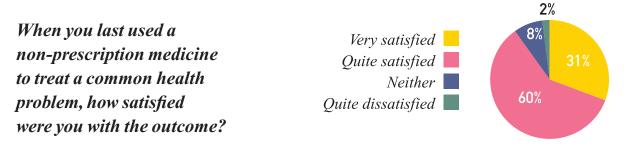
Despite this limited use of pharmacy, the vast majority of people do respect the expertise on offer. Nearly eight out of ten of us think "the pharmacist is a good source of advice on everyday ailments". And for those of us who do make a trip – like when we visit our GP – we usually feel a high level of satisfaction – 39% very satisfied and 51% quite satisfied.

Furthermore, four out of ten of us are happy to seek help from the pharmacy assistant rather than the pharmacist. But half of us (52%) – particularly the over 65s – would like pharmacy staff to offer more advice and information about healthcare products.

What do we think of non-prescription medicines?

In short, we like them a lot.

Nearly nine out of ten of us use 'over-the-counter' medicines to treat common health problems, although men are slightly less likely than women to do so (83% of men have used them in the last year compared to 91% of women).





When we use a non-prescription medicine, we're content with the results too. More than nine out of ten of us (91%) are either 'very satisfied' or 'quite satisfied'.

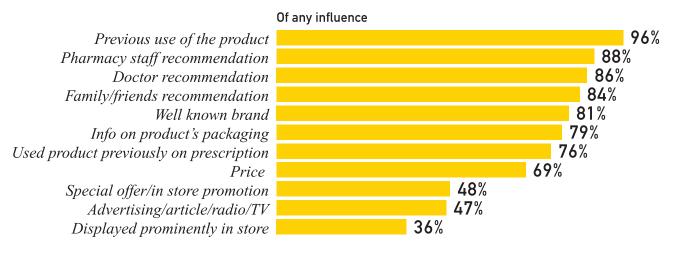
Overall, we very much value being able to buy OTC treatments as a convenient way to deal with ailments. Nearly two-thirds of respondents in this survey agreed with the statement "It is important to have medicines and health supplements that you can buy to help treat or relieve everyday ailments". 84% of us agree that "It is a good thing that you can buy non-prescription treatments that help to prevent a condition as well as treat an ailment".

And, given our high usage of and satisfaction with OTC medicines, it's perhaps not surprising – thinking of the future – that more than seven out of ten respondents indicated they "would welcome more non-prescription medicines to help manage or control more serious or long-term conditions".

How do we make our decision to buy?

Generally, when people are ready to buy a non-prescription medicine or health supplement, it is their previous experience/knowledge of the product that is the most significant influence on their purchase choice.

When you are looking to buy a non-prescription medicine or health supplement at a pharmacy/chemist or supermarket, how much do the following normally influence your choice/decision?



Whether they receive any particular recommendation – notably from the GP or at the pharmacy or from family or friends – can also be very influential.

Most consumers going into a pharmacy or supermarket for an OTC medicine know which particular product they are going to buy. As the table above shows, special offers or promotions in-store or how well products are displayed in store are relatively minor influences.

Where do we buy our non-prescription medicines?

Many (42%) of us choose to go to one of the pharmacy chain stores or an independent, local pharmacist when we want to buy a non-prescription medicine. About a third of us make use of our local supermarket. Very few OTC medicines are bought from specialist health shops, convenience stores or the internet.

Where do you most often buy non-prescription medicines and health supplements for you or your family?

Boots	28%
Supermarket - general shelves	21%
Local independent chemist	17%
Supermarket - in store pharmacy	11%
Moss/Lloyds/pharmacy chain	8%
Superdrug/other discount chain	6%
Mail order/internet	4%
Health shop	3%
Local grocer/CTN	1%

Pointing to self-care

One of the clearest messages from this survey is that people in this country are not only concerned about their health but very much want to take a leading role in managing their health. People want and support the concept of 'self-care'.

Self-care is about individuals taking proactive action for themselves and their families to stay healthy and manage minor and chronic conditions, using the support of health professionals and information sources available to them.

Self-care involves avoiding a dependency on the doctor totally for thinking about and looking after our health. Instead, we take on responsibility for watching our own health and treating everyday ailments and health problems like a cold, indigestion or hayfever with a remedy from our local pharmacy or supermarket, with advice or guidance, when we need it from people like the pharmacist or other sources like NHS Direct.

Medicines and treatments we can buy in the shop enable us to treat everyday health problems quickly and easily without having to go the bother of fixing a GP appointment.

It's so much more convenient. And we can be confident too that the medicines we buy are safe and reliable because they have to go through rigorous scientific tests to get a license.

The UK government has been very keen since 2000 to promote self-care. Its 'NHS Plan' of that year explicitly recognised self-care as a key part of the future of healthcare.

It stressed how self-care is vital to improving the general standard of people's health, reducing health inequalities in communities, reducing the pressure on burdened parts of the NHS like GPs and hospital A & E departments, and optimising the return on NHS expenditure.

Over the last few years there has been a steady flow of health policy and initiatives to increase the role of self-care. Key areas of action have included allowing the availability of a greater range of 'over-the-counter' medicines, introducing more direct sources of health information like NHS Direct, requiring health professionals like pharmacists to support self-care more, and running major health promotion campaigns e.g. stop smoking. Health education in schools and better support for self-care in GP surgeries are also on the agenda.

On a practical front, if a culture of self-care is really to succeed, a recent Department of Health survey (1) indicated that consumers need two things, in particular. They want better information about health to inform and guide them. And they want more encouragement and support from health professionals like their GP and pharmacist.

This Reader's Digest/PAGB survey indicates consumers are up for self-care. It's now a case, then, of making sure they are equipped with the support they need to make it happen.

(1) Public Attitudes to Self Care Baseline Survey, Department of Health, February 2005

Further information

PAGB (the Proprietary Association of Great Britain) is the trade association that represents manufacturers of branded OTC (over-the-counter medicines) and food supplements in the United Kingdom. It was founded in 1919 with the aim to promote responsible consumer health care. For further information on PAGB, please visit *www.pagb.co.uk*.

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