

Fact Sheet: The Use of Over-the-Counter Medicines

Today, more Americans are using more types of nonprescription, over-the-counter (OTC) medicines than ever before to treat everything from coughs, colds, and aches and pains to baldness and smoking cessation. Once consisting of a relatively small number of medications, OTC medicines now account for the majority of all medications used in the United States, including many that were once available only by prescription.

How extensive is the use of OTC medications in this country? The following statistics provide an up-to-date look at the expanding market for OTC medicines:

- Americans buy about five billion over-the-counter drug products each year to treat their routine health problems
- *FDA, 1999*
- Retail sales of OTC medicines in the United States in 2001 (excluding Wal-Mart) were over \$17.8 billion
- *AC Nielsen, 2002*
- At the same time, global OTC product sales totaled \$47 billion worldwide
- *IMS Health, 2002*
- There are more than 80 classes (therapeutic categories) of OTC medications, ranging from acne medications to weight control drug products
- *FDA, 2001*
- OTC medicines account for about 60 percent of all medications used in the United States
- *Drug Information Journal, 1994*
- There are more than 100,000 OTC drug products on the market today encompassing about 1,000 significant active ingredients
- *Consumer Health Products Association (CHPA), 2001*
- Today more than 700 OTC drugs use ingredients and dosages that were only available by prescription less than 30 years ago
- *CHPA, 2001*
- Since 1976, 73 ingredients, dosages or indications have made the “switch” from prescription to OTC status
- *CHPA, 2002*

- Consumers self-treat four times more health problems than doctors
- *FDA, 1997*
- From 60 - 95 percent of all illnesses are initially treated with self-care, including self-treatment with OTC drug products
- *FDA, 1997*
- The vast majority of Americans – 77 percent – report having used OTC medicines in the past six months to treat their common ailments.
- *Roper Starch Worldwide, 2001*
- 82 percent of American women and 71 percent of American men have used a nonprescription medicine in the last six months to treat at least one minor health problem
- *Roper Starch Worldwide, 2001*
- Adults aged 65 and older consume one-third (33 percent) of all nonprescription medicines sold in the United States
- *American Pharmaceutical Association, 2000*
- Those ailments that are most often treated with an OTC drug products are: headaches (81 percent); coughs/colds/flu and sore throat (72 percent); skin problems (68 percent); heartburn (66 percent); and allergy/sinus problems (58 percent)
- *Roper Starch Worldwide, 2001*

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