

Self-Medication and Allergies Survey – Executive Summary

U.S. Adults’ Experiences with Self-Medicating

Over four in five U.S. adults who have experienced various illnesses that can be treated or relieved by non-prescription medications (82%) typically self-medicate for those conditions.

- Colds (56%) and coughs (37%) are the most common conditions for which adults medicate themselves.
- Adults are less likely to self-medicate for seasonal or year-round allergies than they are for illnesses such as coughs, colds, heartburn, and headaches.

Health Conditions Treated or Relieved by Non-Rx or OTC Meds	% Experienced in Past Year <i>Base = U.S. adults ages 18+ (n= 1,005)</i>	% Typically Treated w/ Non-Rx or OTC Meds (% Self-Medicate) <i>Base = Adults who have experienced health condition treated or relieved by non-Rx or OTC meds (n= 806)</i>
Any (net)	81	82
A cold	57	56
Cough	43	37
Allergies (sub-net)	41	32
Seasonal allergies	38	29
Year-round allergies	22	14
Heartburn	31	27
Severe headaches	27	24
Flu	17	13
Rash or hives	8	6
Something else	10	3
None of these	19	17

Seasonal Allergy Sufferers’ Experiences with Self-Medicating

Among the two in five adults who have experienced seasonal allergies in the past year (38%)...

- About nine in ten (89%) typically treat their symptoms, and nearly half (45%) do so with non-prescription medication *only*.
- Two in five (41%) treat their symptoms with prescription medication, and one in four (25%) do so in combination with non-prescription drugs.

Nearly two in three seasonal allergy sufferers (63%) typically treat their allergies with non-prescription or OTC medications before or instead of consulting their doctor.

Reasons Adults Self-Medicate

Adults who self-medicate do so primarily because they are familiar with how to treat their illness due to past experience (90%). In addition, nearly four in five say they self-medicate because:

- It saves them a trip to the doctor's office (78%);
- Their illness isn't serious enough to warrant a doctor's visit (78%); and,
- It saves time (77%).

Among adults who self-medicate, nearly two in three do so because they believe non-prescription medications are just as *safe* as prescription drugs (63%). However, less than half (45%) self-medicate because they think OTC medications are equally as *effective*.

[refer to table on next page...]

Reasons for Self-Medicating	% Citing Reasons for Self-Medicating
	<i>Base = Adults who typically self-medicate for health conditions treated or relieved by non-Rx or OTC meds (n= 650)</i>
You are familiar with how to treat your illness due to past experience treating this condition	90
To save time/distance/money (net)	89
Convenience (sub-net)	86
It saves you a trip to the doctor's office	78
It saves time	77
It saves money	70
Your illness isn't serious enough to require seeing the doctor	78
It allows you to take control of your own care	74
Just as safe/effective (net)	73
Non-Rx meds are just as safe as Rx meds	63
Non-Rx meds are just as effective as Rx meds	45
Another reason	9
None of these	*

Prescription vs. Non-Prescription Medications for Cold and Seasonal Allergy Symptoms

- Nearly three in four U.S. adults (73%) acknowledge that it's easy to confuse allergy symptoms with the symptoms of a common cold.
- More than half (56%) believe that non-prescription cold and allergy treatments are just as effective as prescription treatments.
- However, a majority of adults who typically treat their cold and/or seasonal allergy symptoms with non-prescription medications (70%) typically experience various persistent symptoms that prompt them to eventually consult with a doctor or seek another treatment option.
- The most commonly experienced persistent symptoms are:
 - Chest congestion (38%);
 - Coughing (36%);
 - Nasal congestion (35%); and,
 - Sinus headache (31%).

Risks of Self-Medicating

Among adults who self-medicate their own or their children's illnesses, about three in four (76%) are aware of the potential risks associated with doing so.

- More than half (56%) are aware of the dangers of interactions with other medications, and about half acknowledge the potential for taking more medication (49%), the wrong medication (49%), or taking the medication more frequently than directed (46%).
- More than half (55%) are also aware that self-medicating may mask the symptoms of a more serious health condition.

Though many adults are knowledgeable about the risks of self-medicating, significant minorities have nevertheless engaged in risky behaviors.

- About one in five adults who self-medicate have taken more of a non-prescription drug than directed (20%) and a similar proportion (17%) have taken an OTC medication more frequently than prescribed.
- About two in three seasonal allergy sufferers who treat their symptoms with non-prescription medications (68%) have driven a car while doing so, and more than one in five parents (22%) have driven with their children in the car.

Parents' Experiences with Self-Medicating Their Children

More than four in five parents (83%) report their children having experienced various health conditions that may be treated or relieved by non-prescription medications, and a similar proportion (86%) say they typically self-medicate their children for those illnesses.

- Not surprisingly, the most common illness parents typically self-medicate their children for is the common cold (71%).
- Additionally, more than half (56%) also self-medicate for coughs.
- More than one in four (27%) parents say their child has experienced seasonal allergies in the past year, and nearly one in four (23%) typically treat their child's allergies with non-prescription drugs.

Health Conditions Treated or Relieved by Non-Rx or OTC Meds	% Experienced in Past Year		% Typically Treated w/ Non-Rx or OTC Meds (% Self-Medicate)	
	<i>Base = Parents/Legal guardians of children under 18 (n= 286)</i>	<i>Base: Parents/Legal guardians of children under 12 (n= 198)</i>	<i>Base = Parents/Legal guardians whose children under 18 have experienced health condition treated or relieved by non-Rx or OTC meds (n= 237)</i>	<i>Base = Parents/Legal guardians whose children under 12 have experienced health condition treated or relieved by non-Rx or OTC meds (n= 163)</i>
Any (net)	83	82	86	85
A cold	72	73	71	72
Cough	58	63	56	60
Allergies (sub-net)	32	30	25	22
Seasonal allergies	27	25	23	21
Year-round allergies	15	14	10	9
Flu	23	23	22	21
Rash or hives	15	15	10	11
Severe headaches	11	10	11	8
Heartburn	4	3	4	2
Something else	7	8	2	2
None of these	16	17	13	15
Don't know/Refused	*	*	*	1

Reasons Parents Self-Medicate Their Children

Parents self-medicate their children for different reasons than adults medicate themselves.

- Parents who self-medicate their children are more likely than adults who medicate themselves to say they do so because the illness isn't serious enough to warrant a visit to the doctor (88% parents of children under 18 vs. 78% adults in general).
 - Parents are also more likely than adults in general to believe that non-prescription medications are just as effective as prescription drugs (52% parents of children 18 vs. 45% adults in general).
- Adults who self-medicate are more likely than parents who medicate their children to say they do so in order to save money (70% adults in general vs. 57% parents of children under 18) or a trip to the doctor's office (78% adults in general vs. 65% parents of children under 18).

[refer to table on next page...]

Adults vs. Parents of Children under 18 Reasons for Self-Medicating	% Citing Reasons for Self-Medicating	% Citing Reasons for Self-Medicating Their Children
	<i>Base = Adults who typically self-medicate for health conditions treated or relieved by non-Rx or OTC meds (n= 650)</i>	<i>Base = Parents who typically self-medicate their children for health conditions treated or relieved by non-Rx or OTC meds (n= 205)</i>
You are familiar with how to treat your/your child's illness due to past experience treating this condition	90	93
To save time/distance/money (net)	89	82
Convenience (sub-net)	86	76
It saves you a trip to the doctor's office	78	65
It saves time	77	71
It saves money	70	57
Your/your child's illness isn't serious enough to require seeing the doctor	78	88
It allows you to take control of your own/your child's care	74	70
Just as safe/effective (net)	73	75
Non-Rx meds are just as safe as Rx meds	63	64
Non-Rx meds are just as effective as Rx meds	45	52
Another reason	9	6
None of these	*	1

Parents of Children under 12 Reasons for Self-Medicating	% Citing Reasons for Self-Medicating	% Citing Reasons for Self-Medicating Their Children
	<i>Base = Parents of children under 12 who typically self-medicate for health conditions treated or relieved by non-Rx or OTC meds (n= 144)</i>	<i>Base = Parents of children under 12 who typically self-medicate their children for health conditions treated or relieved by non-Rx or OTC meds (n= 136)</i>
You are familiar with how to treat your/your child's illness due to past experience treating this condition	92	93
To save time/distance/money (net)	92	82
Convenience (sub-net)	81	77
It saves you a trip to the doctor's office	85	64
It saves time	80	72
It saves money	67	57
Your/your child's illness isn't serious enough to require seeing the doctor	79	87
It allows you to take control of your own/your child's care	76	71
Just as safe/effective (net)	75	75
Non-Rx meds are just as safe as Rx meds	65	64
Non-Rx meds are just as effective as Rx meds	46	52
Another reason	14	5
None of these	-	-