

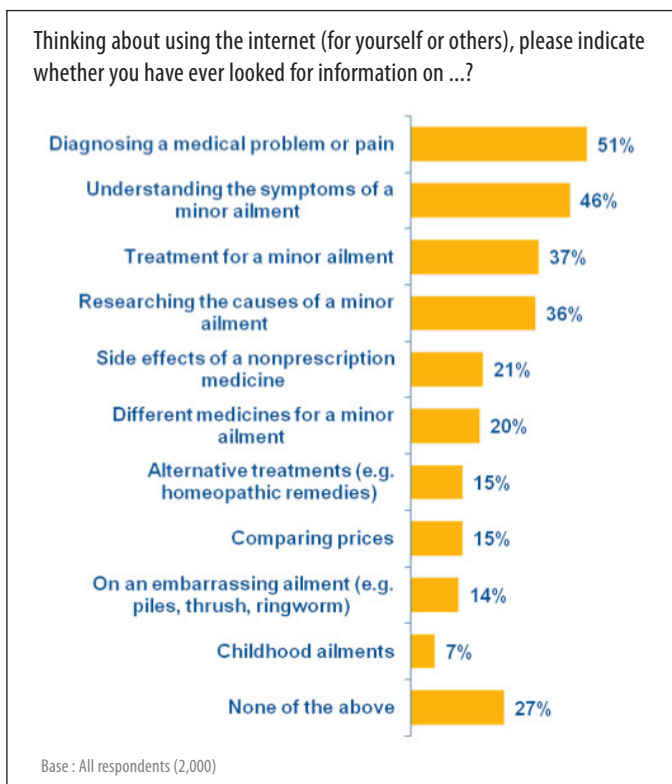
The Online Self-Care Generation Reports Back

People seeking information and advice on everyday ailments (common cold, cough, indigestion, hay fever etc.) say they go to their computers rather than their GPs - but once they get there they can be confused by what is available, according to the latest research from ICM Research.

The research was commissioned by Red Door Communications, PAN Advertising and The Real Adventure, marketing services partners within the Creston Group.

Looking it up online

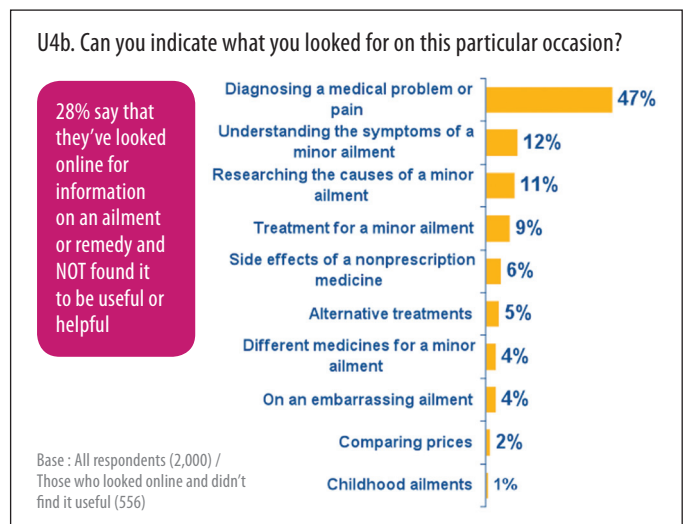
Nearly three quarters of people (73%) have used the internet to check out a minor ailment. Most of the time they want to diagnose their problem, understand the symptoms, or find out what is causing it. To a lesser extent, they use the internet to find a suitable treatment or check out alternative remedies.



Sometimes they just Google their problem, or type in the symptoms. Sometimes they go to a specialist health-related website, NHS or otherwise. And often they do find the information and advice they are looking for. However, over a quarter of those going online (28%) report occasions when the internet hadn't been helpful or useful.

So when isn't the internet useful?

Although problems can occur during any type of online search, they are most common when people try to diagnose a minor ailment (47% of unhelpful searches). Using a specialist diagnosis site, they can end up with multiple options which leave them uncertain as to what they actually have. Sometimes different sites give completely conflicting diagnoses. More worryingly, they can suggest that you have something really serious.



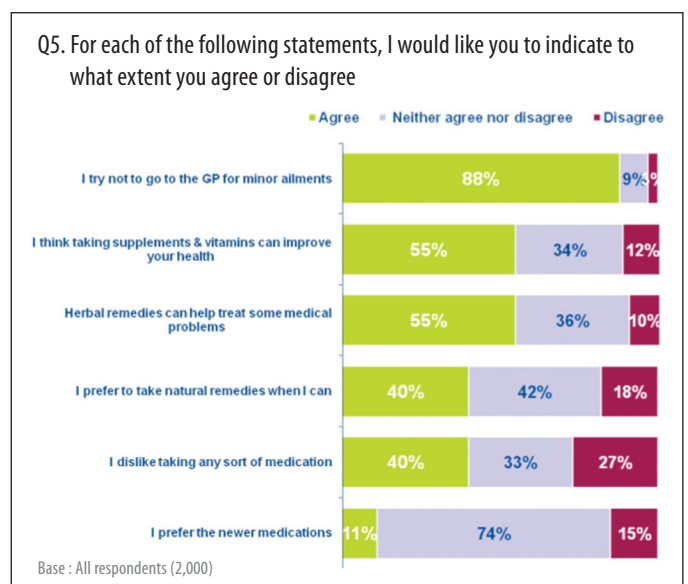
As people reported during the research:

- "There were so many different ailments that came up when I put in my symptoms, it was hard to know what I had"
- "I don't want to look at a screen and [it] says, 'Well, you could have this, you could have that' - because you go to the doctors already scared then, don't you?"
- "One mouse click too many and, looking at minor ailments, [it] can lead you to believe the problem is a lot more sinister than it is"

This can also happen when people check out health-related forums online. They come across horror stories that seemed to start with symptoms similar to their own - or (more worryingly) those of their children. They can end up being told that "my child had this and ended up losing a leg". These internet users (people of all ages) end up confused or worried or both!

Staying away from the GP

Using the internet to check out a health problem doesn't just reflect today's trend to go online for info and advice. The vast majority of people these days (88%) actively try not to go to their GP if they have a minor ailment.



Many know that they can easily buy a product to deal with the problem. Others don't want to bother the doctor unnecessarily – or they report that it just takes too long to get an appointment at the GP's surgery for anything that isn't serious!

In addition to this, a surprisingly large number of people (40%) dislike taking any medication. A similar proportion prefer to take natural remedies when they can. In fact, over half of the population (55%) believe that herbal remedies can help treat some medical problems.

As they reported:

- "I prefer not to take so many drugs ... I just think it can't be good for you"
- "I avoid taking drugs as much as I can. I always go first to a health food shop and ask for natural remedies, before taking drugs"

But the GP can be important

There are times when consumers do want to see the doctor about an ailment or illness. For example: about a quarter of allergy/hayfever sufferers (28%) went to the doctor for treatment advice last time they had a problem. So did a fifth of those with back pain (21%).

More generally, the research found four reasons that prompt people to head for the doctor's surgery:

- *Is it serious?* If someone has ongoing or severe pain - or they have an unexpected or frightening symptom associated with a serious health condition - they want to see their GP. For example, if they think they might have, say, conjunctivitis or psoriasis.
- *Is it infectious?* People not only want to avoid others catching their complaint, but they think antibiotics may be needed to clear it up.
- *It just won't go away!* When the remedies consumers have tried are clearly not working, they need more medical help.
- *Help... I've never had this before!* When people get something for the first time, and they don't realise that they can buy a non-prescription remedy to treat it, they go to see the GP. For example, for their first attack of cystitis or haemorrhoids.

The GP's surgery is also important for parents of babies or small children: 48% of those with children under 5 will go to the GP for advice when their child is unwell. They don't want to take any risks - and they can be very persistent when trying to get a diagnosis and remedy for a sick child. In these circumstances, only the doctor will do.

C5. Thinking about your children's health generally, where do you go to get information if your child is suffering from a minor ailment, such as those listed above?

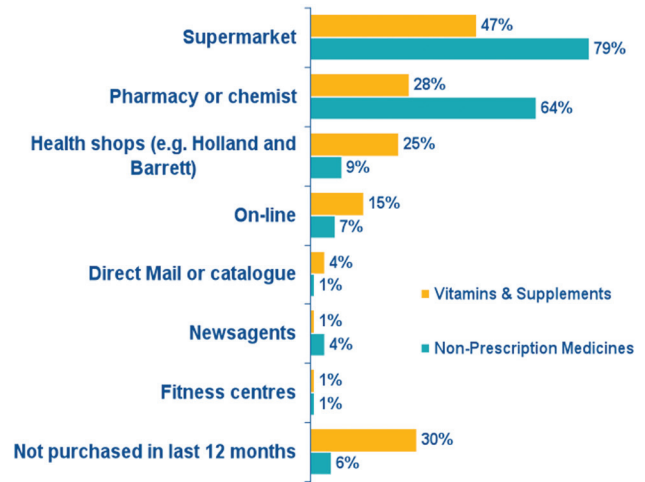


Base : All with children aged under 5 (179)

Staying away from online when purchasing

More and more people (79%) now buy non-prescription medicines from the supermarket. And about two thirds of us (64%) buy from retail chemists or pharmacies. Very few people (7%) buy their over-the-counter medicines online.

Q4. In the last 12 months, where have you purchased vitamins & supplements / any non-prescription medicines



Base : All respondents (2,000)

As was reported during the research, "if you're ill, you ... need it there and then, not 3 days later". People want to get rid of their problem as quickly as possible, especially if it's something painful. This means they can't wait for an online order delivery; instead they pop into the nearest shop and buy a remedy or treatment. Or if it's not that urgent, they add it to their weekly shopping list and buy a product during their next trip to the supermarket.

People are also aware of the very negative press coverage about individuals buying dangerous, non regulated or fake drugs online:

- "You hear all these stories about people selling dodgy things on the internet"
- "If it's something that you're putting into your body, then I wouldn't risk it"

Price sensitivity

Price doesn't play a particularly important role when people buy non prescription medicines. One in four people have switched to a different cough, cold/flu, indigestion or headache remedy in order to get a better price. This compares to about half of all those switching motor insurance products.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Qualitative group discussions

- informal, small-scale discussions with people from 6 different lifestyles
- men and women, from 18 to 70 years, with and without children (toddlers to teenagers)
- users of the internet, retail chemists & some taking vitamins/supplements
- August 2011

Quantitative survey

- 2000 people aged 18+
- nationally representative sample of the adult population of Great Britain
- online questionnaire
- October 2011

For more information about the research, please contact:

christine.garland@icmresearch.com
nick.eul-barker@icmresearch.com