

New Synovate Survey Reveals How Americans View And Use Over The Counter Medicines

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While almost half (48%) of Americans worry about taking any medicines that haven't been prescribed by a doctor, 59% have taken OTC products without properly reading the label or following the directions, according to a new survey by global market research firm Synovate.

Synovate surveyed almost 12,000 people across 15 countries - Australia, Belgium, Chile, France, Hong Kong, Hungary, Indonesia, Korea, Netherlands Serbia, Spain, Taiwan, UAE, UK, USA

- to understand attitudes towards and confidence in purchasing medication over the counter, the belief in the effectiveness of store label medications versus branded ones, as well as the influence of doctors and pharmacists.

So, what is at the top of our medication shopping lists?

Cough / cold medication (58%) and pain relievers (51%) were the top two medications bought over the counter by Americans in the last six months, though the majority claim to take them only on an "as need/not regular" basis.

The US ranked the highest among all countries for anti-histamine/anti-allergy purchases (27%).

Barbara Deradorian, Senior Vice President of Synovate Healthcare, attributes this to the availability of non-prescription antihistamines: "The allergy category is highly developed, which is likely influenced by the prescription-to-OTC switch in the US of the wildly popular Claritin in 2003. Other popular prescription products, such as Benadryl and Zyrtec, also made the switch from prescription to OTC."

Study results also show that women purchase over the counter medications more frequently than men.

"These categories are well developed in the US and women are known to be more compliant with treatment than men, even though men usually suffer just as frequently," adds Deradorian.

Battle of the brands: More than just a label?

Branded versus store's own label? This debate spans industries, not just the over the counter drug market, and opinions are divided.

Globally, 40% of people disagree that a store's own OTC products are just as effective as branded products, while almost two thirds (65%) of Americans feel this way.

It is not surprising then that 44% of respondents globally prefer to use / give their families recognised brands.

However, a few markets are mostly indifferent in this, including the US. When asked if they preferred to use / give their family recognized brands, only 14% of Americans agreed.

"Private label products have come a long way here in the US so they are becoming more acceptable, particularly given the fact that people are regularly buying cheaper alternatives and are satisfied that they are just as effective," says Deradorian. "This switch to private label will likely remain after the economy recovers due to people's current positive experience."

In good hands?

Synovate also asked Americans about their health information sources, with the three most popular being:

1. GP / Family Doctor / Physician / Public health doctor (62%)
2. Previous experience (42%)
3. Specialist Doctor / General health specialist (33%)

Almost half (48%) of Americans also said they worry about taking any medicines that haven't been prescribed by a doctor, and nearly half (49%) disagree when asked if they prefer obtaining medications over the counter rather than through a doctor.

However, the majority (59%) also admit to having taken OTC products without properly reading the label or following the directions.

OTC meds and travel

Synovate asked US respondents which over the counter medications they take with them when traveling, and the top three were:

1. Pain relievers (59%)
2. Gastrointestinal products (24%)
3. Anti-histamine/anti-allergy (23%)

Americans are comfortable buying these types of product abroad, with 40% strongly or somewhat agreeing that they would do so. More than half (56%) would even ask other people to buy over the counter medicines for them while traveling.

"This is likely driven by Americans comfort and experience with taking OTC medications," said Deradorian. "Also, many medications that are prescription in the US can be bought over the counter in other countries and some Americans try to procure products abroad that they would otherwise need a prescription for in the US."

When it comes to taking sleeping pills, whether travelling or not, it seems there is no middle ground, only strong levels of comfort versus discomfort.

Almost half of Americans (42%) admit to taking sleeping pills on a daily basis, and 62% agree are happy to take them when travelling abroad to help with sleep.

Deradorian attributes these high numbers to the American lifestyle. "Americans' use of sleeping pills is likely driven by the high stress levels reported here, which prompts more issues with sleep. It's a continual cycle."

About the Synovate In:fact global study

This Synovate In:fact survey on over the counter products was conducted in December 2009 across 17 markets - Australia, Belgium, Chile, France, Germany, Hong Kong, Hungary, Indonesia, Korea, Netherlands, Serbia, Singapore, Spain, Taiwan, UAE, UK, USA.

It covered almost 12,000 respondents and was conducted using online, face to face and telephone research methodologies.

About Synovate

For more information on Synovate visit www.synovate.com .

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