



Health Topics

80% of internet users look for health information online

Susannah Fox, Associate Director

February 1, 2011

<http://pewinternet.org/Reports/2011/HealthTopics.aspx>

Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project
1615 L St., NW – Suite 700
Washington, D.C. 20036
202-419-4500 | pewinternet.org

Summary of Findings

Food safety, drug safety, and pregnancy information are among eight new topics included in our survey.

Health information remains one of the most important subjects that internet users research online. The Pew Internet Project and California HealthCare Foundation have added eight new topics to our national survey measuring internet users' interest in health information:

- 29% of internet users look online for information about food safety or recalls.
- 24% of internet users look online for information about drug safety or recalls.
- 19% of internet users look online for information about pregnancy and childbirth.
- 17% of internet users look online for information about memory loss, dementia, or Alzheimer's.
- 16% of internet users look online for information about medical test results.
- 14% of internet users look online for information about how to manage chronic pain.
- 12% of internet users look online for information about long-term care for an elderly or disabled person.
- 7% of internet users look online for information about end-of-life decisions.

Symptoms and treatments continue to dominate internet users' health searches.

Six topics were repeated from previous surveys, in some cases adding to trends that date back to 2002:

- 66% of internet users look online for information about a specific disease or medical problem (perennially in the top spot).
- 56% of internet users look online for information about a certain medical treatment or procedure.
- 44% of internet users look online for information about doctors or other health professionals.
- 36% of internet users look online for information about hospitals or other medical facilities.
- 33% of internet users look online for information related to health insurance, including private insurance, Medicare or Medicaid.
- 22% of internet users look online for information about environmental health hazards.

Looking for health information is the third most popular online activity measured in our surveys.

Eight in ten internet users look online for health information, making it the third most popular online pursuit among all those tracked by the Pew Internet Project, following email and using a search engine. Since one-quarter of adults do not go online, the percentage of health information seekers is 59% among the total U.S. adult population.

The survey finds that not only are some demographic groups more likely than others to have internet access, but these same groups are generally more likely to seek health information once online.

The most likely groups to look online for health information include:

- Adults who, in the past 12 months, have provided unpaid care to a parent, child, friend, or other loved one
- Women
- Whites
- Adults between the ages of 18-49
- Adults with at least some college education
- Adults living in higher-income households

By contrast, fewer than half of adults in the following groups in the U.S. look online for health information:

- African Americans
- Latinos
- Adults living with a disability
- Adults age 65 and older
- Adults with a high school education or less
- Adults living in low-income households (\$30,000 or less annual income)

However, young people, Latinos, and African Americans are increasingly likely to use mobile devices to gather information, which could potentially shift the patterns among those groups when it comes to using health information resources.

Acknowledgements

This report is the result of collaboration between the Pew Internet Project and the California HealthCare Foundation.

The Pew Internet & American Life Project is an initiative of the Pew Research Center, a nonprofit “fact tank” that provides information on the issues, attitudes and trends shaping America and the world. The Project is nonpartisan and takes no position on policy issues. Support is provided by The Pew Charitable Trusts.

The California HealthCare Foundation is an independent philanthropy committed to improving the way health care is delivered and financed in California.

All quantitative, numerical data is based on a September 2010 national telephone survey conducted by Princeton Survey Research Associates International (PSRAI).

PSRAI is an independent firm dedicated to high-quality research providing reliable, valid results for clients in the United States and around the world.

Main Report

Section 1: Health Information is a Popular Pursuit Online

59% of all adults in the U.S. look for health information online.

Eight in ten internet users look online for health information, making it the third most popular online activity among all those included in the Pew Internet Project's surveys.¹

Activity	Millennials Ages 18-34	Gen X Ages 35-46	Younger Boomers Ages 47-56	Older Boomers Ages 57-65	Silent Gen. Ages 66-74	G.I. Gen. Age 75+	All online adults Age 18+
Go online	95%	86%	81%	76%	58%	30%	79%
For the following activities, the youngest and oldest cohorts may differ, but there is less variation between generations overall:							
Email	96	94	91	93	90	88	94
Use search engine	92	87	86	87	82	72	87
Look for health info	78	84	80	83	73	69	80
Get news	76	79	76	76	67	54	75
Buy a product	68	66	64	69	59	57	66

Source: Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project surveys, 2008-2010. Findings for individual activities are based on adult **internet users**. For survey dates of all activities cited, please see the Methodology section at the end of the Generations 2010 report: <http://pewinternet.org/Reports/2010/Generations-2010/Methodology/Note-on-survey-dates.aspx>

Internet access drives information access.

Since one-quarter of adults do not go online, the percentage of health seekers is lower among the total population: 59% of adults in the U.S. look online for health information.

Women, non-Hispanic whites, younger adults, and those with higher levels of education and income are more likely than other demographic groups to gather health information online.

There are two forces at play in the data: access to the internet and interest in health information. For example, women and men are equally likely to have access to the internet, but women are more likely than men to report gathering health information online, which explains the gender gap in the chart below.

For the other groups, the rate of internet adoption combined with their level of interest in health information drives their numbers either up or down. This is particularly true when it comes to

¹ "Generations 2010" (Pew Internet Project: December 16, 2010). Available at: <http://pewinternet.org/Reports/2010/Generations-2010.aspx>

education: only 38% of adults with less than a high school education go online, compared with 93% of adults with a college degree. Once online, 62% of internet users who have not graduated from high school say they gather health information online, compared with 89% of internet users with a college degree. The result is a significant gap in information access: just one in four adults who lack high school diplomas gather health information online, compared with eight in ten college graduates.

Looking online for health information: Demographics

	Percentage of all adults who go online	Percentage of all adults who look online for health information
All adults in the U.S.	74%	59%
Gender		
Male	73	53
Female	75	65
Race		
White	77	63
African American	66	47
Latino	62	45
Age		
18-29	92	71
30-49	79	66
50-64	71	58
65+	40	29
Education		
Some high school	38	24
High school	64	45
Some college	84	70
College graduate	91	81
Household income		
< \$30,000	57	41
\$30,000 - \$49,999	80	66
\$50,000 - \$74,999	86	71
\$75,000+	95	83

Source: Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project, August 9-September 13, 2010 Survey. N=3001 adults and the margin of error is +/- 3 percentage points for the full sample. Margins of error for sub-populations are higher.

Adults who, in the past 12 months, have provided unpaid care for a loved one are among the most likely people to have looked online for health information of all kinds (see table below). Caregivers are not

only often in need of health information but have the means to obtain it online: eight in ten have access to the internet.

Another group with reason to seek health information online are people who faced a serious medical emergency or crisis in the past year, either their own or that of someone close to them. Medical crises crop up in many people's lives, across demographic groups, so there is little difference between the groups when it comes to internet access. The internet once again distinguishes itself for these users as a just-in-time information resource.²

Interestingly, a third group – people who have experienced any other significant change in their physical health in the past year, such as gaining or losing a lot of weight, becoming pregnant, or quitting smoking – do not report a higher rate of health information seeking compared with other people.

As the Pew Internet Project and the California HealthCare Foundation have reported in the past, people who are living with chronic disease or disability are likely, if they have internet access, to be highly interested in online health information. For those two groups, it is their lack of access to the internet which holds them back from parity with people who report no chronic conditions.

² "Information Searches That Solve Problems" (Pew Internet Project: December 30, 2007). Available at: <http://pewinternet.org/Reports/2007/Information-Searches-That-Solve-Problems.aspx>

Looking online for health information: Health status

	Percentage of all adults who go online	Percentage of all adults who look online for health information
All adults in the U.S.	74%	59%
Caregiver status		
Currently caring for a loved one (N=860)	79	70
Not a caregiver	71	54
Recent medical crisis		
Experienced within past year – self or someone close (N=982)	76	65
No recent experience	72	55
Recent personal health change		
Experienced within past year (N=499)	68	56
No recent experience	75	59
Chronic disease status		
One or more chronic conditions (N=1488)	64	53
No conditions	81	62
Disability status		
One or more disabilities (N=906)	54	42
No disabilities	81	65

Source: Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project, August 9-September 13, 2010 Survey. N=3001 adults and the margin of error is +/- 3 percentage points for the full sample. Margins of error for sub-populations are higher.

The typical search for health information is on behalf of someone else.

Half of internet users (48%) who go online for health information say their last search was on behalf of another person, 36% say their last search was on behalf of themselves, and 11% say it was both for themselves and someone else. Thus, while eight in ten internet users go online for health information, the impact of their inquiries may be much broader.

Caregivers are the most likely group to say they were thinking of someone else during their last search: 53%, compared with 45% of internet users who are not currently caring for a loved one. Online parents with young children living at home are another group likely to say their last health information query was on behalf of someone else: 56%, compared with 43% of internet users who do not have children under 18 living at home.

Internet users ages 30-49 are the most likely age group to be focused on other people, which is not surprising since two-thirds of this group have young children living at home and may also be looking for information on behalf of aging relatives. Fifty-five percent of internet users in their 30s and 40s say their last search was on someone else's behalf, compared with 42% of internet users ages 18-29, 46% of internet users ages 50-64, and 36% of internet users ages 65 and older.

Section 2: Profiles of Health Information Seekers

Health information gathering online has been consistently popular over the last decade. Eight in ten internet users looked online for health information in 2002 and the same proportion do so today. What has changed is who has access to the internet. With the exception of adults age 70 and older and those with less than a high school education, internet use has shifted from being exceptional to being commonplace. And the Pew Internet Project's consistent finding is that if someone is online, they are in the game when it comes to all kinds of online activities, including health information seeking. What follows are thumbnail sketches of notable groups of health information seekers.

Women

Men and women are equally likely to have internet access: 73% of men and 75% of women go online. However, in a familiar pattern, women continue to pull ahead when it comes to pursuing health information online: ³ 86% of online women do so, compared with 73% of online men.

Online women significantly outpace online men in their pursuit of information about specific diseases or medical problems, certain treatments or procedures, doctors or other health professionals, hospitals or other medical facilities, food safety or recalls, drug safety or recalls, and pregnancy and childbirth.

Not a single topic included in the survey attracts more attention from men than from women.

Caregivers

The word "caregivers" is used throughout this report to refer to people who, in the past 12 months, have provided unpaid care to a parent, child, friend, or other loved one. Unpaid care for an adult may include help with personal needs or household chores, managing finances, arranging for outside services, or visiting regularly to see how they are doing. Unpaid care to a child includes care for an ongoing or serious short-term condition, emotional or behavioral problems, or developmental problems.

Seventy-nine percent of caregivers have access to the internet. Of those, 88% look online for health information.

Caregivers distinguish themselves in this study as people focused on health information. They outpace other internet users when it comes to researching every single health topic included in the survey, often by double-digit margins.

A report coming out later this spring will profile caregivers in greater detail.

College-educated adults

³ "How Women and Men Use the Internet" (Pew Internet Project: December 28, 2005). Available at: <http://pewinternet.org/Reports/2005/How-Women-and-Men-Use-the-Internet.aspx>

Fully 91% of college graduates in the U.S. have internet access, compared with 64% of adults with a high school diploma. Statistical analysis by the Pew Internet Project has shown that education is one of the strongest predictors of whether someone has access to the internet.⁴ Health outcomes are also closely tied to education levels. The Centers for Disease Control reports that people who have not completed high school are at increased risk for unhealthy behaviors and death.⁵

Differences among adults with various levels of education are echoed in health information gathering online: 89% of internet users with a college degree do so, compared with 70% of internet users with a high school degree. The numbers drop even further when looking at adults who have less than a high school education – just 38% go online and, of those, 62% say they gather health information online. Thus there is a magnifying effect where online health information seeking is concerned; not only are some groups more likely to have internet access, but those same groups are generally more likely to seek health information once online.

College graduates outpace high school graduates by 20+ points on a majority of health topics included in the survey. There are exceptions, however. Information about pregnancy and childbirth attracts equal levels of interest from internet users at all education levels, as does information about end-of-life decisions.

Higher-income adults

Income is another strong predictor of internet access: 95% of adults who live in households with \$75,000 or more in annual income go online, compared with 57% of adults who live in households with \$30,000 or less in annual income. Higher-income adults are also more likely than lower-income groups to have the latest gadgets and to use them to gather information of all kinds.⁶

Again, the disparity is repeated in the two groups' likelihood to look online for health information: once online, 87% of upper-income internet users do so, compared with 72% of internet users living in lower-income households.

This finding is echoed in international research: the Bupa Health Pulse 2010 finds that higher levels of income and education are associated with a greater likelihood to have internet access and to go online for health information among people living in Australia, Brazil, China, France, Germany, India, Italy, Mexico, Russia, Spain, the United Kingdom and the U.S.⁷

⁴ "Chronic Disease and the Internet" (Pew Internet Project: March 24, 2010). Available at: <http://pewinternet.org/Reports/2010/Chronic-Disease.aspx>

⁵ Fact Sheet: Health Disparities in Education and Income (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, Centers for Disease Control: January 2011). Available at: <http://cdc.gov/minorityhealth/reports/CHDIR11/FactSheets/EducationIncome.pdf> (Full report: <http://cdc.gov/Features/HealthDisparitiesReport/>)

⁶ "Use of the internet in higher-income households" (Pew Internet Project: November 24, 2010). Available at: <http://pewinternet.org/Reports/2010/Better-off-households.aspx>

⁷ "Online Health: Untangling the Web" (Bupa Health Pulse 2010 and the London School of Economics and Political Science: January 2011). Available at: <http://www.bupa.com/mediacentre/healthpulse>

Adults living with chronic conditions

Nearly half of U.S. adults live with a chronic disease such as high blood pressure or diabetes.⁸ The current survey asked about five major diseases – high blood pressure, heart conditions, lung conditions, diabetes, and cancer – plus a catch-all question to capture any chronic conditions not included in the list.

The Pew Internet Project and California HealthCare Foundation have previously found that people living with chronic conditions such as diabetes or high blood pressure are significantly less likely to have internet access. However, once online, they are just as likely as everyone else to look for health information.⁹

That pattern is repeated in the current survey: 64% of adults living with at least one chronic condition have internet access, compared with 81% of adults who report no chronic conditions. Yet once online, 83% of internet users living with chronic conditions say they look online for health information, compared with 77% of internet users living with no such conditions.

Indeed, internet users living with chronic conditions are keen to gather health information online, particularly about specific diseases, treatments, health insurance, and drug safety or recalls. They outpace or match other internet users on nearly every topic. The one exception is information about pregnancy and childbirth, which is more popular among people not living with any of the conditions named in the survey.

A report coming out later this spring will profile people living with chronic conditions in greater detail.

Adults living with disabilities

This survey also included a series of questions about physical and mental abilities:

- 15% of American adults say they have serious difficulty walking or climbing stairs.
- 11% of American adults say that, because of a physical, mental, or emotional condition, they have serious difficulty concentrating, remembering, or making decisions.
- 9% of American adults say they have serious difficulty hearing.
- 8% of American adults say that, because of a physical, mental, or emotional condition, they have difficulty doing errands alone such as visiting a doctor's office or shopping.
- 7% of American adults say they are blind or have serious difficulty seeing, even when wearing glasses.
- 3% of American adults say they have trouble dressing or bathing.

People who answer “yes” to any one of the above questions are categorized as living with a disability.

⁸ Centers for Disease Control: Chronic Disease at a Glance 2009. Available at: <http://www.cdc.gov/chronicdisease/resources/publications/AAG/chronic.htm>

⁹ “Chronic Disease and the Internet” (2010)

In addition, 2% of American adults say they have a disability or illness that makes it harder or impossible for them to use the internet.

Fifty-four percent of adults living with a disability go online, compared with 81% of adults who report none of the disabilities listed.¹⁰ Once online, the two groups are equally likely to use the internet to gather health information: 78% of internet users living with disability do so, compared with 80% of internet users with no disabilities.

Internet users living with disabilities are just as likely as other internet users to research most health topics included in the survey, with the exception of information about doctors or other health professionals and information about pregnancy and childbirth. Both of those topics are more popular among internet users who report no disabilities.

Adults who faced a recent medical crisis, their own or a loved one's

Twelve percent of American adults say they personally faced a serious medical emergency or crisis in the past year. One in four American adults (27%) says someone close to them faced such an emergency. There is no statistical difference in internet adoption rates between those who experienced a medical crisis, their own or someone else's, and those who did not.

Serious medical emergencies cut across all demographic groups and seem to bump up interest in online health research. Fully 85% of internet users who experienced a recent medical crisis say they look online for any of the health topics named in the survey, compared with 77% of internet users who have not had that experience in the past year. In fact, those who went through a serious medical situation in the past year out-search their counterparts on every topic but one: pregnancy and childbirth.

Home broadband users

Two-thirds of adults in the U.S. have a home broadband connection. Younger adults, those with higher levels of education or income, and those living in urban or suburban areas are the most likely groups to have broadband access at home.

Previous research by the Pew Internet Project has found that 34% of Americans believe that lack of broadband is a "major disadvantage" when it comes to getting health information.¹¹

Eighty-two percent of home broadband users go online for health information, compared with 67% of internet users with dial-up access. Broadband users are more likely than dial-up users to look online for eight of the fifteen topics included in the survey.

Wireless internet users

¹⁰ "Americans living with disability and their technology profile" (Pew Internet Project: January 21, 2011). Available at: <http://pewinternet.org/Reports/2011/Disability.aspx>

¹¹ "Home Broadband 2010" (Pew Internet Project: August 11, 2010). Available at: <http://pewinternet.org/Reports/2010/Home-Broadband-2010.aspx>

Fifty-seven percent of adults in the U.S. go online using a mobile connection, such as a laptop with wireless access or a smartphone. Past Pew Internet research has consistently shown that these wireless internet users are more heavily engaged than other internet users in a wide range of online activities.¹²

¹² “The Mobile Difference” (Pew Internet Project: March 25, 2009). Available at: <http://pewinternet.org/Reports/2009/5-The-Mobile-Difference--Typology.aspx>

	Percentage of all adults who go online with a wireless connection	Percentage of all adults who go online, but do not have a wireless connection	Percentage of all adults who do not go online
All adults in the U.S.	57%	20%	23%
Gender			
Male	62	16	22
Female	52	24	23
Race			
White	55	24	21
African American	59	12	29
Latino	62	12	26
Age			
18-29	83	11	5
30-49	70	15	15
50-64	42	32	26
65+	19	24	57
Education			
Some high school (N=431)	35	11	54
High school	48	22	30
Some college	64	23	13
College graduate	73	20	6
Household income			
< \$30,000 (N=980)	47	17	36
\$30,000 - \$49,999	59	25	16
\$50,000 - \$74,999	65	23	12
\$75,000+	80	16	4
Language			
English	59	21	21
Spanish (N=197)	34	12	54
Community type			
Rural	43	25	32
Suburban	60	20	20
Urban	60	18	22

Source: Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project, August 9-September 13, 2010 Survey. N=3001 adults and the margin of error is +/- 3 percentage points for the full sample. Margins of error for sub-populations are higher.

Eighty-three percent of wireless internet users have looked online for health information, compared with 70% of internet users who do not use a mobile connection. Wireless users have wide-ranging interests: they significantly outpace their desktop-bound counterparts on thirteen of the fifteen topics included in the survey. For example, 48% of wireless users look online for information about doctors or other health professionals, compared with 31% of internet users who do not have mobile access.

Cell phone owners

Eighty-five percent of American adults own a cell phone. Older adults are less likely than younger adults to use a mobile phone, but their numbers are still robust: 58% of adults ages 65 and older own one.

The Pew Internet Project has previously found that 17% of cell phone users have specifically used their phones to look up health or medical information.¹³

Disparities in access and in interest in health information once again combine to magnify differences among groups. The table below details the percentage of adults in each demographic group who have access to a cell phone and who use a cell phone to look for health information. For example, younger adults are much more likely than older adults to both have a cell phone. Younger cell phone users are also more likely than older ones to use their phones to look for health information. The result is significant gaps among demographic groups when it comes to on-the-phone health searches.

¹³ "Mobile Health 2010" (Pew Internet Project: October 19, 2010). Available at: <http://pewinternet.org/Reports/2010/Mobile-Health-2010.aspx>

	Percentage of all adults who own a cell phone	Percentage of all adults who use a cell phone to look for health info
All adults in the U.S.	85%	15%
Gender		
Male	88	15
Female	82	13
Race		
White	85	13
African American	79	15
Latino	84	21
Age		
18-29	96	28
30-49	90	16
50-64	85	6
65+	58	5
Education		
Some high school	69	16
High school	82	10
Some college	91	19
College graduate	90	18
Household income		
< \$30,000	75	11
\$30,000 - \$49,999	90	15
\$50,000 - \$74,999	93	16
\$75,000+	95	18
Language		
English	85	15
Spanish (N=197)	74	10
Community type		
Rural	77	9
Suburban	86	14
Urban	84	18

Source: Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project, August 9-September 13, 2010 Survey. N=3001 adults and the margin of error is +/- 3 percentage points for the full sample. Margins of error for sub-populations are higher.

Search engines provide another perspective on mobile health information-gathering. Yahoo, for example, reports that "pregnancy," "herpes," and "STD" (sexually transmitted diseases) are among the top five searches performed on the mobile version of their site. These topics do not appear at all among the top five health searches for the non-mobile versions of either Yahoo or Google.¹⁴

¹⁴ "Your top health searches, asked and answered" (CNN: October 21, 2010). Available at: <http://www.cnn.com/2010/HEALTH/10/21/top.health.searches.answered/>

Section Three: Health Topics

Not surprisingly, some questions are perennially at the top of the list among internet users looking online for health information: What do I have? How do I treat it? Who can help me figure this out? Where should I go to get a procedure done? The Pew Internet Project and California HealthCare Foundation added some new topics to the list this year such as food safety, drug safety, and how to manage chronic pain. What follows are all the health topics included in the survey, from the most commonly-searched to the least.

Specific disease or medical problem

66% of internet users look online for information about a specific disease or medical problem.

Caregivers, women, internet users with a college degree, and internet users living with chronic conditions (particularly those with high blood pressure) lead all other groups in their interest in researching specific diseases or medical problems. Fully three-quarters of each of these groups look online for this type of health information.

This topic has been in the top spot since the Pew Internet Project began measuring internet users' interest in health topics in 2002, when 63% of internet users said they looked online for information about a specific disease or medical problem.¹⁵

To give an idea of the types of information people are looking for online, we asked one of the top health websites, WebMD.com, for a list of the most commonly searched conditions in 2010:

1. Shingles
2. Gallbladder
3. Gout
4. Hemorrhoids
5. Lupus
6. Skin Problems
7. Allergies
8. Heart Disease
9. Diabetes
10. Sleep Disorders

Certain medical treatment or procedure

56% of internet users look online for information about a certain medical treatment or procedure.

Caregivers, women, those with a college degree, internet users living with chronic conditions (particularly those with lung conditions and high blood pressure), and parents with children living at

¹⁵ "Internet Health Resources" (Pew Internet Project: July 16, 2003). Available at: <http://pewinternet.org/Reports/2003/Internet-Health-Resources.aspx>

home lead all other groups in their interest in researching certain medical treatments. Two-thirds of each of these groups looks online for this type of health information.

This topic has been the second-most popular topic since the Pew Internet Project began measuring internet users' interest in health topics in 2002, when 47% of internet users said they looked online for information about a certain medical treatment or procedure.

The most commonly searched-for treatments on WebMD in 2010 were as follows:

1. Pain relievers
2. Anti-depressants
3. High blood pressure medication
4. Corticosteroids
5. Hysterectomy
6. Diabetes medication
7. ADHD medication
8. Antibiotics
9. Colonoscopy
10. Cholesterol-lowering medication

Doctors or other health professionals

44% of internet users look online for information about doctors or other health professionals.

Caregivers, women, those with a college degree, and parents with children living at home lead all other groups in looking online for information about doctors or other health professionals. Half of internet users in each of these groups look online for this type of health information.

Generation X internet users (ages 34-45) are the most likely age group to look online for information about health professionals: 51%, compared with 41% of internet users in their 20s and 42% of internet users between 56-64 years old, for example.

This is the second time Pew Internet has asked about this health topic and the results have not changed significantly over time: in 2008, 47% of internet users looked online for information about health professionals.¹⁶

Hospitals or other medical facilities

36% of internet users look online for information about hospitals or other medical facilities.

Caregivers, women, those with a college degree, those between 34-45 years old, and parents with children living at home lead all other groups in looking online for information about this topic. Four in

¹⁶ "The Social Life of Health Information" (Pew Internet Project: June 11, 2009). Available at: <http://pewinternet.org/Reports/2009/8-The-Social-Life-of-Health-Information.aspx>

ten internet users in each of these groups look online for information about hospitals or other medical facilities.

In 2008, the first time hospitals were singled out in a question, 38% of internet users said they looked online for this type of information, which is not significantly different from the current measurement.

Health insurance

33% of internet users look online for information related to health insurance, including private insurance, Medicare or Medicaid.

Caregivers, college graduates, and those living with chronic conditions (particularly high blood pressure) are among the likeliest groups to research this topic online. Four in ten internet users in each of these groups look online for information about health insurance, either public or private.

Pew Internet has asked this form of the health insurance question since 2008 and interest has held steady at one-third of the internet population. Prior surveys split the question – one for health insurance, the other for Medicare/Medicaid – but the results were essentially the same.¹⁷

Food safety

29% of internet users look online for information about food safety or recalls.

Caregivers, women, college graduates, those between 34-45 years old, and parents with children living at home lead all other groups in looking online for information about food safety. One-third of internet users in these groups have looked online for this type of information.

This is the first time Pew Internet has measured internet users' interest in this topic.

Drug safety

24% of internet users look online for information about drug safety or recalls.

Caregivers, women, college graduates, and internet users living with chronic conditions (particularly those with lung conditions) lead all other groups in their interest in drug safety information. Age is also a significant predictor: 29% of Generation X internet users (34-45) say they have done this type of research online, compared with 21% of internet users ages 46-55 years old.

This is the first time Pew Internet has measured internet users' interest in this topic.

Environmental health hazards

22% of internet users look online for information about environmental health hazards.

¹⁷ "Online Health Search 2006" (Pew Internet Project: October 29, 2006). Available at: <http://pewinternet.org/Reports/2006/Online-Health-Search-2006.aspx>

This topic is of equal interest across the board when it comes to men, women, age groups, and those with various levels of education. Caregivers and those living with chronic conditions (particularly lung conditions) are more likely than other groups to look online for information about environmental health hazards.

Environmental health hazards has risen a bit in popularity among internet users since 2002, when 17% of internet users said they had researched this topic online.

Pregnancy and childbirth

19% of internet users look online for information about pregnancy and childbirth.

As one would expect, gender and age are the significant predictors of interest in this topic. One in four female internet users (24%) has looked online for information about pregnancy and childbirth, compared with 13% of male internet users. Fully 31% of internet users between the ages of 18 and 33 have looked online for information about pregnancy and childbirth, compared with 25% of those between 34-45 years old, and just 5% of internet users age 46 or older. Current parents are also more likely than internet users who do not have children living at home to do this type of research (32%, compared with 12%).

This is the first time Pew Internet has measured internet users' interest in this topic.

Memory loss, dementia, or Alzheimer's

17% of internet users look online for information about memory loss, dementia, or Alzheimer's.

Women, caregivers, and those living with chronic conditions (particularly lung conditions) outstrip other groups in their interest in this topic. One in four internet users in each of the groups named above use the internet to look for information about mental decline.

This is the first time Pew Internet has measured internet users' interest in this topic.

Medical test results

16% of internet users look online for information about medical test results.

College graduates, caregivers, and those living with chronic conditions are the most likely groups to use the internet to get information about medical test results.

This is the first time Pew Internet has measured internet users' interest in this topic.

How to manage chronic pain

14% of internet users look online for information about how to manage chronic pain.

Caregivers and those living with chronic conditions (particularly lung conditions) report the highest interest in this topic.

This is the first time Pew Internet has measured internet users' interest in chronic pain management.

Long-term care

12% of internet users look online for information about long-term care for an elderly or disabled person.

Women, those living with chronic conditions, and older adults are more likely than other groups to say they have looked online for this type of information. Not surprisingly, one in five caregivers has researched long-term care for a loved one, marking the highest level of interest among any group.

This is the first time Pew Internet has measured internet users' interest in this topic.

End-of-life decisions

7% of internet users look online for information about end-of-life decisions.

This topic garners essentially the same level of interest across all demographic groups, with a slight uptick among caregivers.

This is the first time Pew Internet has measured internet users' interest in this topic.

Any other health issue

28% of internet users look online for information about any other health issue.

This question is one of the "catch-all" questions included in a survey which sometimes reveal lost opportunities. For example, fully 40% of caregivers say yes to this question, showing that the survey may only have scratched the surface of the health topics they spend their time on.

Section Four: Summary Charts

The % of internet users who have looked online for information about...

66	specific disease or medical problem
56	certain medical treatment or procedure
44	doctors or other health professionals
36	hospitals or other medical facilities
33	health insurance, including private insurance, Medicare or Medicaid
29	food safety or recalls
24	drug safety or recalls
22	environmental health hazards
19	pregnancy and childbirth
17	memory loss, dementia, or Alzheimer's
16	medical test results
14	how to manage chronic pain
12	long-term care for an elderly or disabled person
7	end-of-life decisions
28	another health topic not included in the survey
80	at least one of the above topics

Source: Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project, August 9-September 13, 2010 Survey. N=3001 adults and the margin of error is +/- 3 percentage points for the full sample. Margins of error for sub-populations are higher.

Health topic	Sex			Education level			
	All internet users	Women	Men	Some high school	High school grad	Some college	College grad
	N=2065	N=1198	N=867	N=122	N=552	N=563	N=813
Specific disease or medical problem	66	74	57	45	54	70	77
Certain medical treatment or procedure	56	63	48	32	44	60	67
Doctors or other health professionals	44	50	36	26	31	43	58
Hospitals or other medical facilities	36	41	30	21	27	35	47
Health insurance, including private insurance, Medicare or Medicaid	33	34	32	13	27	34	42
Food safety or recalls	29	32	26	17	21	33	36
Drug safety or recalls	24	28	19	15	17	26	30
Environmental health hazards	22	22	23	21	15	23	28
Pregnancy and childbirth	19	24	13	19	15	21	19
Memory loss, dementia, or Alzheimer's	17	19	14	14	12	20	18
Medical test results	16	18	14	7	11	16	23
How to manage chronic pain	14	15	13	12	10	18	16
Long-term care for an elderly or disabled person	12	13	9	13	7	13	14
End-of-life decisions	7	7	7	2	5	9	9
Another health topic not included in the survey	28	31	25	10	17	33	37
At least one of the above topics	80	86	73	62	70	83	89

Source: Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project, August 9-September 13, 2010 Survey. N=3001 adults and the margin of error is +/- 3 percentage points for the full sample. Margins of error for sub-populations are higher.

Health topic	Race/ethnicity				Age			
	All internet users	White	Black	Latino	18-29	30-49	50-64	65+
	N=2065	N=1267	N=356	N=285	N=499	N=666	N=581	N=274
Specific disease or medical problem	66	70	54	58	60	70	69	62
Certain medical treatment or procedure	56	60	42	47	48	60	59	55
Doctors or other health professionals	44	45	41	36	37	53	41	30
Hospitals or other medical facilities	36	35	38	34	34	43	29	25
Health insurance, including private insurance, Medicare or Medicaid	33	33	31	33	32	36	32	30
Food safety or recalls	29	29	31	29	27	33	28	25
Drug safety or recalls	24	25	22	19	21	29	21	19
Environmental health hazards	22	23	22	18	24	23	19	23
Pregnancy and childbirth	19	17	21	23	28	25	4	4
Memory loss, dementia, or Alzheimer's	17	17	18	14	16	14	19	14
Medical test results	16	17	11	17	15	19	14	17
How to manage chronic pain	14	14	14	13	14	16	12	14
Long-term care for an elderly or disabled person	12	12	12	9	10	10	16	10
End-of-life decisions	7	6	9	8	6	8	8	2
Another health topic not included in the survey	28	30	22	24	25	33	26	19
At least one of the above topics	80	82	71	73	77	84	81	72

Source: Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project, August 9-September 13, 2010 Survey. N=3001 adults and the margin of error is +/- 3 percentage points for the full sample. Margins of error for sub-populations are higher.

Topics	2002	2004	2006	2008	2010
Specific disease or medical problem	63%	66%	64%	66%	66%
Certain medical treatment or procedure	47	51	51	55	56
Exercise or fitness	36	42	44	52	*
Diet, nutrition, vitamins, or nutritional supplements	44	51	49	*	*
Prescription or over-the-counter drugs	34	40	37	45	*
Doctors or other health professionals	*	*	*	47	44
Hospitals or other medical facilities	*	*	*	38	36
Alternative treatments or medicines	28	30	27	35	*
How to lose weight or how to control your weight	*	*	*	33	*
Health insurance: private insurance, Medicare, Medicaid, etc.	*	*	*	37	33
Food safety or recalls	*	*	*	*	29
Drug safety or recalls	*	*	*	*	24
A particular doctor or hospital	21	28	29	*	*
Health insurance	25	31	28	*	*
Depression, anxiety, stress, or mental health issues	21	23	22	28	*
Environmental health hazards	17	18	22	*	22
Experimental treatments or medicines	18	23	18	20	*
Pregnancy and childbirth	*	*	*	*	19
Memory loss, dementia, or Alzheimer's	*	*	*	*	17
Medical test results	*	*	*	*	16
Immunizations or vaccinations	13	16	16	*	*
Dental health information	*	*	15	*	*
How to manage chronic pain	*	*	*	*	14
Medicare or Medicaid	9	11	13	*	*
Long-term care for an elderly or disabled person	*	*	*	*	12
How to stay healthy on a trip overseas	*	*	*	12	*
Sexual health information	10	11	11	*	*
How to quit smoking	6	7	9	*	*
Problems with drugs or alcohol	8	8	8	*	*
End-of-life decisions	*	*	*	*	7
Any other health topic	*	*	*	26	28
At least one item in that year's survey	80	79	80	83	80

Source: Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project, 2002-2010 Survey. Margin of error for all surveys is +/- 3 percentage points for the full sample of internet users. Margins of error for sub-populations are higher.

Methodology

This report is based on the findings of a daily tracking survey on Americans' use of the internet. The results in this report are based on data from telephone interviews conducted by Princeton Survey Research Associates International between August 9 and September 13, 2010, among a sample of 3,001 adults, age 18 and older. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish. For results based on the total sample, one can say with 95% confidence that the error attributable to sampling is plus or minus 2.5 percentage points. For results based Internet users (n=2,065), the margin of sampling error is plus or minus 2.9 percentage points. In addition to sampling error, question wording and practical difficulties in conducting telephone surveys may introduce some error or bias into the findings of opinion polls.

Questions

Q6ab Do you use the internet, at least occasionally? Do you send or receive email, at least occasionally?

CURRENT

%	74	Yes
	26	No
	*	Don't know
	*	Refused

Q10 As I read the following list of items, please tell me if you happen to have each one, or not. Do you have... a cell phone or a Blackberry or iPhone or other device that is also a cell phone?

CURRENT

%	85	Yes
	15	No
	*	Don't know
	*	Refused

Q14 On your cell phone, do you happen to have any software applications or “apps” that help you track or manage your health, or not?

Based on cell phone users [N=2,485]

CURRENT		
%	9	Yes
	90	No
	1	Don't know
	*	Refused

Q15 Do you ever use your cell phone to look up health or medical information?

Based on cell phone users [N=2,485]

CURRENT		
%	17	Yes, do this
	83	No, do not do this
	*	Don't know
	0	Refused

Q17 Are you now living with any of the following health problems or conditions:

	YES	NO	DON'T KNOW	REFUSED
a. Diabetes or sugar diabetes				
Current	11	89	*	*
December 2008	10	90	*	1
b. High blood pressure				
Current	24	75	1	*
December 2008	23	76	1	1
c. Asthma, bronchitis, emphysema, or other lung conditions				
Current	12	88	*	*
December 2008	12	87	*	1
d. Heart disease, heart failure or heart attack				
Current	6	94	*	*
December 2008	7	92	1	1
e. Cancer				
Current	2	97	*	*
December 2008	3	96	1	1
f. Any other chronic health problem or condition I haven't already mentioned				
Current	17	82	*	1

Q18 In the last 12 months, have you personally faced a serious medical emergency or crisis?¹⁸

	CURRENT		DEC 2008	AUGUST 2006
%	12	Yes	31	34
	88	No	69	65
	*	Don't know	*	1
	*	Refused	*	--

¹⁸ Trend question wording was "And in the last 12 months, have you or has someone close to you faced a serious medical emergency or crisis?"

Q19 And in the last 12 months, have you experienced any other significant change in your physical health, such as gaining or losing a lot of weight, becoming pregnant, or quitting smoking?

	CURRENT	
%	17	Yes
	83	No
	*	Don't know
	*	Refused

Q20 Is there anyone close to you who has a CHRONIC medical condition, such as asthma, diabetes, heart disease, high blood pressure, cancer, or another chronic condition?

	CURRENT		DEC 2008 ¹⁹
%	47	Yes	49
	53	No	50
	*	Don't know	*
	*	Refused	1

Q21 In the last 12 months, has anyone close to you faced a serious medical emergency or crisis?²⁰

	CURRENT		DEC 2008	AUGUST 2006
%	27	Yes	31	34
	72	No	69	65
	*	Don't know	*	1
	*	Refused	*	--

¹⁹ In December 2008, question wording was "Is there anyone close to you who has a CHRONIC medical condition, such as asthma, diabetes, heart disease, high blood pressure, or cancer?"

²⁰ Trend question wording was "And in the last 12 months, have you or has someone close to you faced a serious medical emergency or crisis?"

Q22 Now, we'd like to ask if you've looked for information ONLINE about certain health or medical issues. Specifically, have you ever looked online for...?

Based on all internet users [N=2,065]

	YES, HAVE DONE THIS	NO, HAVE NOT DONE THIS	DON'T KNOW	REFUSED
a. Information about a specific disease or medical problem				
Current	66	34	*	*
December 2008	66	34	*	0
August 2006	64	36	*	--
November 23-30, 2004	66	34	*	--
December 2002	63	37	*	--
b. Information about a certain medical treatment or procedure				
Current	56	44	*	*
December 2008	55	45	*	*
August 2006	51	48	1	--
November 23-30, 2004	51	48	*	--
December 2002	47	53	0	--
c. Information about doctors or other health professionals				
Current	44	56	*	*
December 2008	47	53	*	*
d. Information about hospitals or other medical facilities				
Current	36	64	*	*
December 2008	38	62	*	*
e. Information related to health insurance, including private insurance, Medicare or Medicaid				
Current	33	67	*	*
December 2008	37	63	0	*
August 2006 ²¹	33	67	*	--
f. Information about environmental health hazards				
Current	22	77	*	*
August 2006	22	78	*	--
November 23-30, 2004	18	82	0	--
December 2002	17	83	*	--

²¹ August 2006 trend was recalculated to reflect combined responses for two separate items: "Information related to health insurance" and "Information about Medicare or Medicaid"

	YES, HAVE DONE THIS	NO, HAVE NOT DONE THIS	DON'T KNOW	REFUSED
g. Information about pregnancy and childbirth				
Current	19	81	*	*
h. Information about end-of-life decisions				
Current	7	93	*	*
i. Information about long-term care for an elderly or disabled person				
Current	12	88	*	*
j. Information about food safety or recalls				
Current	29	70	*	*
k. Information about drug safety or recalls				
Current	24	76	*	*
l. Information about how to manage chronic pain				
Current	14	86	*	*
m. Information about medical test results				
Current	16	83	*	*
n. Information about memory loss, dementia, or Alzheimer's				
Current	17	83	*	*
o. Information about any other health issue				
Current	28	72	*	*
December 2008	26	73	1	*
Total yes to any item above	80			
Total no to all items		20		

Q23 Thinking about the LAST time you went online for health or medical information... Did you go online to look for information related to YOUR OWN health or medical situation or SOMEONE ELSE'S health or medical situation?

Based on online health seekers

	CURRENT		DECEMBER 2008	AUGUST 2006	DECEMBER 2002
%	36	Own	41	36	37
	48	Someone else's	43	48	49
	11	Both (VOL.)	9	8	8
	4	Don't know	4	8	7
	2	Refused	2	--	--
	[1,655]		[1,356]	[1,594]	[1,017]

DIS001 Thinking again about your own health... Do you have serious difficulty hearing?

CURRENT
% 9 Yes
90 No
* Don't know
* Refused

DIS002 Are you blind or do you have serious difficulty seeing even when wearing glasses?

CURRENT
% 7 Yes
93 No
* Don't know
* Refused

DIS003 Because of a physical, mental, or emotional condition, do you have serious difficulty concentrating, remembering, or making decisions?

CURRENT
% 11 Yes
89 No
* Don't know
* Refused

DIS004 Do you have serious difficulty walking or climbing stairs?

CURRENT
% 15 Yes
84 No
* Don't know
* Refused

DIS005 Do you have difficulty dressing or bathing?

CURRENT
% 3 Yes
97 No
* Don't know
* Refused

DIS006 Because of a physical, mental, or emotional condition, do you have difficulty doing errands alone such as visiting a doctor's office or shopping?

CURRENT
% 8 Yes
92 No
* Don't know
* Refused

CARE2 In the past 12 months, have you provided UNPAID care to an adult relative or friend 18 years or older to help them take care of themselves? Unpaid care may include help with personal needs or household chores. It might be managing a person’s finances, arranging for outside services, or visiting regularly to see how they are doing. This person need not live with you.

[IF RESPONDENT ASKS DOES GIVING MONEY COUNT:] Aside from giving money, do you provide any other type of unpaid care to help them take care of themselves, such as help with personal needs, household chores, arranging for outside services, or other things?

CURRENT		
%	27	Yes
	72	No
	*	Don’t know
	*	Refused

CARE3 Do you provide this type of care to just one adult, or do you care for more than one adult?
Based on those who provide unpaid care to adults [N=790]

CURRENT		
%	66	One adult only
	33	Provide care to multiple adults
	*	Don’t know
	*	Refused

CARE4 Is this person a parent of yours, or not?

CARE5 Are any of the adults you care for a parent of yours, or not?
Based on those who provide unpaid care to adults [N=790]

CURRENT		
%	38	Yes, parent
	62	No, not a parent
	*	Don’t know
	*	Refused

CARE6 In the past 12 months, have you provided UNPAID care to any CHILD under the age of 18 because of a medical, behavioral, or other condition or disability? This could include care for ongoing medical conditions or serious short-term conditions, emotional or behavioral problems, or developmental problems, including mental retardation.

CURRENT		
%	5	Yes
	94	No
	*	Don’t know
	*	Refused