

***Consumer Attitudes on Over-the-Counter (OTC) Medicine Use, Storage, and Disposal***  
**Survey conducted by Harris Poll**  
**Key Findings**

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**SAFE USE**

**The vast majority of adults agree on the importance of reading over-the-counter (OTC) medicine labels and do so regularly, especially when giving to children under 12**

- ✧ Most adults (91%) read any portion of the label at least sometimes when using OTCs for themselves or a child
- ✧ 8 out of 10 adults with children under 18 in the household (79%) always read any portion of the label when giving OTCs to a child

**Awareness and behavior is high for checking ingredients**

- ✧ Nearly 9 in 10 adults (89%) report being mindful of other medications they may be taking and their ingredients when they take an OTC medicine.
- ✧ 3 in 4 consumers (75%) review the ingredients on the labels of OTC medicines before using to see if any other medications they may be taking also have those ingredients

**The vast majority of adults with children under 18 in the household and give or purchase OTCs for child(ren) are diligent when giving OTC medicine to a child**

- ✧ 98% look closely at the age restrictions on the OTC medicines they give the children in their household
- ✧ 96% check the label to make sure the medicine is appropriate for the children's age in their household

**Most say they take precautions such as speaking to a health care professional before using an OTC other than directed, and some have contacted a healthcare professional recently with OTC questions and concerns**

- ✧ More than 6 in 10 consumers (62%) say they consult with a healthcare professional if they are going to use an OTC medicine other than how it is directed on the label
- ✧ About 1 in 5 adults (19%) have contacted a doctor, pharmacist, or other health care professional with questions or concerns about an OTC medicine in the last six months; this behavior is even more prevalent among adults who have children under 18 in the house (26%)

**Consumers express modest approval on giving adult OTCs to children age 12 or younger, provided a healthcare professional is consulted first or recommends it**

- ✧ Nearly 2 in 3 adults (64%) believe it is or may be okay to give adult OTC medicines to a child age 12 or younger, IF a healthcare professional is consulted first or recommends it
- ✧ 1 in 5 adults (21%) say it is never appropriate

## **SAFE STORAGE**

**The safe storage of OTC medicines is important – almost all adults agree that OTC medicines can be abused (96%) and that they should be kept up and away and out of sight of children (96%)**

- ✎ Nearly 2 in 3 adults (64%) say that regardless of if there are children living in the household, it is important to use child resistant packaging on OTC medicines
- ✎ The majority (94%) agree that all adults should make sure their OTCs are stored in a way that prevents misuse, and 87% say they would notice if OTCs in their home went missing

**There is clear recognition that safe OTC storage protects children – most adults (96%) say it is important to store OTC medicines out of reach of children, especially children age 12 or under**

- ✎ More than 9 in 10 adults agree that safe OTC storage helps to prevent accidental ingestion in younger children (97%) and misuse or abuse in older children (92%)

**The majority of adults with children under 18 in the home (85%) know where to find information on safe OTC storage, yet some still store their medicines where children can reach them**

- ✎ More than 1 in 3 adults with children under 18 in the home (36%) say the location where OTCs are stored in their home is accessible to a child

## **SAFE DISPOSAL**

**Most adults check expiration dates on OTC medicine frequently for themselves or a child**

- ✎ 84% of consumers say they check the expiration date on an OTC medicine label at least sometimes when using for themselves
- ✎ Among those with children under 18 in the household and give or purchase OTCs for child(ren), 93% say they check the expiration date at least sometimes when giving an OTC medicine to a child

**OTC disposal is important to adults, yet few have ever sought out information about how to properly dispose of them**

- ✎ Nearly 9 in 10 adults (89%) say the way in which someone disposes of unwanted or expired OTC medicines is important, with more than 4 in 10 saying “very important”
- ✎ However, more than 3 in 5 adults (62%) have never sought information about how to properly dispose of unwanted or expired OTC medicines. Although it is most common for adults to have

sought out information about proper OTC disposal from a healthcare professional, only 20% have done so.

**The most common way adults dispose of OTC medicines is to put them in the trash**

- ✎ Half (50%) state they typically dispose of their unwanted or expired OTC medicines by throwing them in the trash, but only 8% mix them with an undesirable substance before doing so

**Despite more than half (58%) recognizing that OTC medicines can be safely disposed of in the home, they do not view this as the best way to dispose of unwanted or expired OTC medicines**

- ✧ Only 1 in 5 adults (18%) believe disposing of OTCs in the household trash or mixing them with an undesirable substance before doing so is the best way to discard unwanted or expired OTCs

#### **IMPORTANCE OF CONTINUED CONSUMER EDUCATION**

**The majority of adults (84%) know where to find information on safe OTC storage, yet many find the information available confusing, admit they could be better at safe storage, and 1 in 3 wish they knew more on the topic**

- ✧ Nearly 1 in 2 adults (46%) admit they could be better at properly and safely storing OTC medicines and about 1 in 3 (32%) wish they knew more about safely storing these medicines
- ✧ Six in 10 adults (61%) have sought out information on OTC safe storage at some point, most commonly from a drug facts label (38%) or a healthcare professional (35%); However, 1 in 5 (21%) find the information that is available about safe OTC storage confusing

**There is an opportunity to educate adults on proper disposal of expired or unwanted OTC medicines, with seven in 10 adults (70%) saying they could be better at properly disposing of their OTC medicines**

- ✧ Nearly half of adults (49%) wish they knew more about proper OTC disposal

#### **Survey Methodology:**

The survey was conducted online by Harris Poll on behalf of the Consumer Healthcare Products Association (CHPA) from February 3-9, 2015 among 2,002 U.S. adults 18+ who have used or purchased oral OTC medicines in the last six months. Data are weighted where necessary by age, gender, race/ethnicity, region, education, income, and propensity to be online to bring them in line with their actual proportions in the population.

For more information on the **CHPA Educational Foundation**, visit [KnowYourOTCs.org](http://KnowYourOTCs.org)

*Established in 2004, the foundation mission is to be the trusted source of information on the responsible use of consumer healthcare products including OTC medicines and dietary supplements. Through public/private partnerships, national educational campaigns, and media efforts, the foundation educates consumers on how to safely use, store, and dispose of OTC medicines and dietary supplements. Information and materials represent the latest medical and scientific thinking and research and address specific areas where we know consumers need guidance and support.*