Self-Care Trends Among Older Americans

**Older Americans report they have fewer everyday illnesses than their younger counterparts.**
- Only 37 percent of people age 65-plus report having been ill in the last three months. In contrast, 53 percent of adults between the ages of 18 and 34 say they have been sick. It may be that as we age, our personal definition of being “sick” or “ill” becomes more stringent while our personal tolerance for illness increases.

**Older Americans suffer less from certain minor health conditions.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Health Problem</th>
<th>18-34 (%)</th>
<th>35-49 (%)</th>
<th>50-64 (%)</th>
<th>65+ (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cough, cold, flu or sore throat</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Headaches</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allergy or sinus problems</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skin problems</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upset stomach or nausea</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teeth or gum problems</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**A majority of seniors prefer to treat their own health conditions.**
- Although people 65-plus are the most likely of all age groups to visit the doctor, 66 percent of older Americans feel that they have a good idea about the diagnosis before they go.
- More than half (54 percent) of people 65-plus prefer to treat health conditions themselves rather than going to the doctor. While a majority, this proportion is 19 percentage points lower than the national average.
- A sizeable proportion - 48 percent of older Americans - say that they are more likely to treat their own health conditions today than they were a year ago.
- In fact, 67 percent of Americans older than age 65 have used an over-the-counter drug in the last 6 months to treat one of the common ailments from which they suffer. In addition, 57 percent report having used dietary supplements.

**Older Americans are more satisfied with dietary supplements for general health.**
Among those who have used dietary supplements in the past six months, percent saying they are very satisfied, by age:

- **18-34**: 38%
- **35-49**: 45%
- **50-64**: 47%
- **65+**: 53%
Trends toward self-reliance will continue. It appears that this trend toward self-care will continue. Forty-eight percent of seniors report that in the future they would like to diagnose and treat more ailments at home rather than going to see a doctor.

- Among those who are aware of the options, older Americans are more satisfied than younger Americans with the nonprescription options available to treat ailments such as constipation, diarrhea, and minor skin problems. For example, half of all Americans age 65 plus say they are very satisfied with the nonprescription options available to treat skin problems. Only one-third of 18 to 34 year olds say they are very satisfied.

- Forty-two percent of people over 65 are receptive to the idea of treating certain serious conditions with nonprescription medication if they were made available and carried appropriate labeling compared to a national average of 52%.

All data provided by the Consumer Healthcare Products Association, the 120-year-old trade association representing U.S. manufacturers and distributors of nonprescription, over-the-counter medicines and dietary supplement products. The findings are based on 1,505 interviews conducted via telephone by Roper Starch Worldwide from January 8-24, 2001. The results of the survey are projectable to the entire U.S. population with a margin of error of +/-2.6 percent. For more information, contact Corinne Russell or Donna Edenhart (202-429-9260; crussell@chpa-info.org or dedenhart@chpa-info.org) or visit www.chpa-info.org.