

Cyberchondriacs Continue to Grow in America

- 110 million people sometimes look for health information online, up from 97 million a year ago
- On average, they do so three times a month
- Most use a portal or search engine

Ehealth, the use of the Internet related to health and health care, continues to grow. One hundred and ten million adults sometimes go online to look for health care information (Harris Interactive calls them “cyberchondriacs”). On average, they search the Web for this type of information three times a month. They mainly do so using a portal or search engine, rather than by going directly to particular sites. These are the results of a Harris Interactive telephone survey of a nationwide sample of 707 adults who are online from home, office, school, library or some other location, conducted in March.

Our research finds that 80% of all adults who are online (i.e., 53% of all adults) sometimes use the Internet to look for health care information. However, only 18% say they do this “often,” while most do so “sometimes” (35%), or “hardly ever” (27%).

This 80% of all those online amounts to 110 million cyberchondriacs nationwide. This compares with 54 million in 1998, 69 million in 1999 and 97 million last year.

TABLE 1

Frequency of Accessing Health Care Information Online: 1998-2002

“How often do you look for information online about health topics – often, sometimes, hardly ever or never?”

Base: Have access to Internet

	June/July 1998%	June 1999%	March 2001%	March 2002%
Often	12	13	16	18
Sometimes	30	30	30	35
Hardly ever	29	31	30	27
Never	29	26	25	20
Total who have ever looked for health or medical information	71	74	75	80

TABLE 2

Cyberchondriacs: Trends

	June/July 1998%	June 1999%	March 2001%	March 2002%
% of all adults who are online*	38	46	63	66
% of all those online who have looked for health information	71	74	75	80
% of all adults who have looked for health information online	27	34	47	53
Numbers of adults who have looked for health information online	54 million	69 million	97 million	110 million

* Includes those online from home, office, school, library or other location

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HEALTH CARE RESEARCH

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On average those who ever look for health care information online do so three times every month. However, this average is based on a minority of cyberchondriacs who do so rather often. Almost half do so once a month or less.

TABLE 3

Frequency Of Looking For Health Care Information In Last Month

“About how many times have you looked for information online about health topics in the last month?”

Base: Ever look for health care information online

	March 2001	March 2002
Mean (average)	3.3	3.0
Median	1.2	1.2

Heavy Internet users were online 8 hours or more in the last week.

Light Internet users were online fewer than 3 hours in the last week.

A slender majority (53%) of those who look for health care information do so using a portal or search engine which allows them to search for the health information they want across many different websites. About a quarter (26%) goes directly to a site that focuses only on health-related topics and one in eight (12%) visits first a general site that may offer a section on health issues.

TABLE 4

Where People Go To Look For Health Topics Online

“The last time you looked for information online about a health topic where did you FIRST go to get the information your were interested in? Did you FIRST go to a ...?”

Base: Ever look for health care information online

	March 2001%	March 2002%
Site that focuses only on health-related topics OR	24	26
A site that focuses on many subjects that may have a section devoted to health issues, OR	16	12
A portal or search engine which will allow you to search for health information across many different sites	52	53
Not sure/refused	7	8

Heavy Internet users were online 8 hours or more in the last week.

Light Internet users were online fewer than 3 hours in the last week.

Cyberchondriacs (those who go online for health information) tend to be younger (which fits the profile of frequent Internet users) and they are better educated and more affluent than the general population. Cyberchondriacs include 82% of people aged 18 to 29, 84% of those with postgraduate education and 77% of people with household incomes of over \$75,000.

TABLE 5

Cyberchondriacs Penetration

Demographic profile of people who have looked for health information online

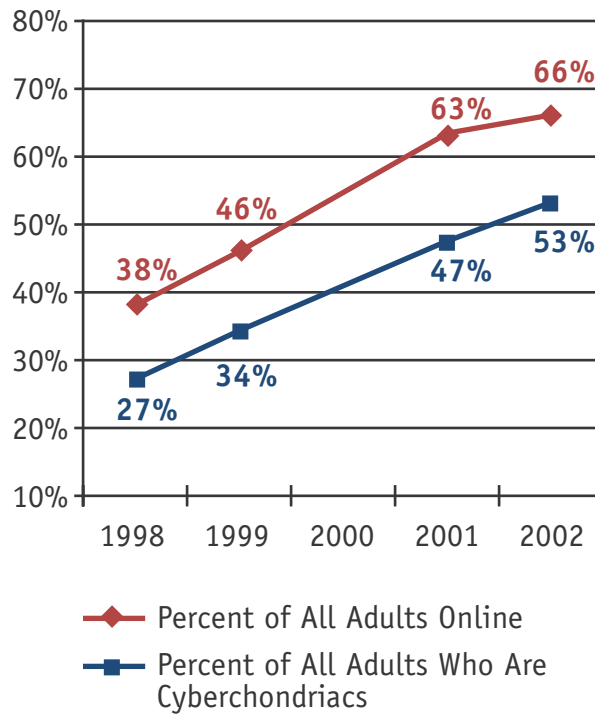
	%
% of all adults who have looked for health information online	53
AGE	
18 – 29	82
30 – 39	68
40 – 49	63
50 – 64	49
65 +	26
SEX	
Male	59
Female	60
EDUCATION	
High School or less	49
Some College	63
College graduate	75
Post graduate	84
INCOME	
Less than \$15,000	50
\$15,000 to \$24,999	45
\$25,000 to \$34,999	55
\$35,000 to \$49,999	53
\$50,000 to \$75,999	67
\$75,000 and over	77

These data from *The Harris Poll*[®] show that the Internet continues to be used by huge, and growing, numbers of the public interested in getting information about particular diseases or treatments or staying healthy. The results also demonstrate the critical importance for health care websites to be quickly and easily accessible through search engines and portals.

Data from other Harris Interactive research show that, increasingly, cyberchondriacs are using the sites of established organizations – academic, governmental, pharmaceutical, etc. – rather than using “pure ehealth” sites. As in many other fields, bricks and clicks are beating dot.coms.

Our data also show that the Internet is used more by people with some medical conditions (e.g. gynecological conditions, chronic sinusitis, arthritis, migraine and thyroid conditions) than by those with others (e.g., asthma, skin conditions, high cholesterol, hypertension). The Internet is also particularly useful to those with poor access to medical services and those who have trouble getting the care they need.

Cyberchondriacs: Trends 1998 - 2002



About Harris InteractiveSM

Harris Interactive is a worldwide market research and consulting firm, best known for *The Harris Poll*[®] and its pioneering use of the Internet to conduct scientifically accurate market research. Strengthened by its recent merger with Total Research Corporation, the Company now combines the power of technology with international expertise in predictive, custom, strategic research. Headquartered in the United States with offices in the United Kingdom, Japan, and a global network of local market and opinion research firms, the Company conducts international research with fluency in multiple languages. For more information about Harris Interactive, visit www.harrisinteractive.com. EOE M/F/D/V

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