

No Significant Change in the Number of “Cyberchondriacs” – Those Who Go Online for Health Care Information

For the second year in a row, Harris Interactive finds no significant change in the numbers of adults who have ever been online to look for health information. In our latest survey on this topic, we find that 74% of all those online have looked online for health information at some time. These “cyberchondriacs” are now 51% of all adults or some 111 million people.

However, many of these people are “infrequent cyberchondriacs”; a third of them “hardly ever” go online for health information, as compared with the 60% of cyberchondriacs (i.e., 67 million adults) who have been online for health care information in the previous month.

These are some of the results of a Harris Interactive survey of 1,020 adults nationwide who were surveyed by telephone between February 9 and 16, 2004.

When the percentages are used to calculate actual numbers of people, our data show the numbers of cyberchondriacs rising from 54 million in 1998, to 97 million in 2001, 109 million a year ago and 111 million now. In other words, the number of cyberchondriacs rose sharply until 2001 but has increased much more slowly because of the modest growth of the online population.

The main reason that the growth of cyberchondriacs slowed was that Internet penetration slowed. Since 1998, the proportion of all those online who use the Internet to look for health information has remained relatively stable at between 71% and 80%.

TABLE 1
Cyberchondriacs: Trends

	1998	1999	2001	2002	2003	Feb. 2004
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Percent of all adults who are online*	38	46	63	66	67	69
Percent of all those online who have ever looked for health information online	71	74	75	80	78	74
Percent of all adults who have ever looked for health information online	27	34	47	53	52	51
Percent of all adults who have looked for health information online in last month)	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	35
Numbers of adults who have ever looked for health information online	54 million	69 million	97 million	110 million	109 million	111 million

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

NOTE: 2004 figures calculated based on number of U.S. adults online (146 million) which is based on U.S. Census estimate of 218 million adults overall in the U.S.

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What’s Ahead in Health Care News?

During this year, Harris Interactive and IMS Health will launch a global physician poll that provides insights on the perspectives and experiences of physicians in the U.S., U.K., France, Germany, Italy and Spain. Look for results in upcoming issues of the Harris Interactive *Health Care News*.

Frequency of Use

Some cyberchondriacs go online for health information a lot; others use it only very occasionally. While 60% of cyberchondriacs (31% of the public) say they have gone online for health information in the previous month, a third of them say they “hardly ever” do so.

Among the 111 million cyberchondriacs, there is a *hard-core minority of very frequent users*: 15% of cyberchondriacs (8% of the general public) report *going online for health information ten or more times in the previous month*.

TABLE 2
Frequency of Accessing Health Care Information Online: 1998-2004

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

Base: Have access to Internet

	1998	1999	2001	2002	2003	Feb. 2004
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Often	12	13	16	18	17	19
Sometimes	30	30	30	35	37	31
Hardly ever	29	31	30	27	23	24
Never	29	26	25	20	22	26
Total who have ever looked for health or medical information online	71	74	75	80	78	74

NOTE: Numbers may not add up due to rounding.

TABLE 3
Number of Times Looked for Health Information Online in Last Month

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

Base: All “cyberchondriacs” (who are 74% of those online and 51% of all adults)

	Cyberchondriacs %	As % of All Those Online	As % of All Adults
Not once	21	(16)	(11)
1 or 2 times	26	(19)	(13)
3 – 5 times	14	(10)	(7)
6 – 9 times	5	(4)	(3)
10 or more times	15	(11)	(8)
Not sure	19		
Gone online for health information in the last month	60%	(44%)	(31%)

How People Use The Internet to Look for Health Information

When people use the Internet to look for health care information, they are more likely to use a portal or search engine (51%) that can search many different sites rather than go directly to a health-specific site (23%) or another specific site with a health care section (14%). These proportions have not changed much since our previous surveys over the last three years.

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 you were interested in? Did you FIRST go to a ...?”

Base: All “cyberchondriacs”

	2001	2002	2003	2004
	%	%	%	%
Site that focuses only on health-related topics OR	24	26	20	23
A site that focuses on many subjects that may have a section devoted to health issues, OR	16	12	17	14
A portal or search engine which will allow you to search for health information across many different sites	52	53	54	51
Not sure/refused	7	8	8	12

NOTE: Numbers may not add up due to rounding.

Downloadable PDFs of the Harris Interactive *Health Care News* are available at http://www.harrisinteractive.com/news/newsletters_healthcare.asp

Methodology

The Harris Poll® was conducted by telephone within the United States between February 9 and 16, 2004 among a nationwide cross-section of 1,020 adults (ages 18+). Figures for age, sex, race, education, number of adults and number of voice/telephone lines in the household were weighted where necessary to align them with their actual proportions in the population.

In theory, with a probability sample of this size, one can say with 95 percent certainty that the results have a statistical precision of ±3 percentage points of what they would be if the entire adult population had been polled with complete accuracy. Unfortunately, there are several other possible sources of error in all polls or surveys that are probably more serious than theoretical calculations of sampling error. They include refusals to be interviewed (non-response), question wording and question order, interviewer bias, weighting by demographic control data and screening (e.g., for likely voters). It is impossible to quantify the errors that may result from these factors.

These statements conform to the principles of disclosure of the National Council on Public Polls.

Health Care News

4 Volume

7 Issue

2004
April 12

About Harris Interactive®

Harris Interactive (www.harrisinteractive.com) is a worldwide market research and consulting firm best known for *The Harris Poll*®, and for pioneering the Internet method to conduct scientifically accurate market research. Headquartered in Rochester, New York, Harris Interactive combines proprietary methodologies and technology with expertise in predictive, custom and strategic research. The Company conducts international research from its U.S. offices and through wholly owned subsidiaries—London-based **HI Europe** (www.hieurope.com), Paris-based **Novatris** and Tokyo-based **Harris Interactive Japan**—as well as through the Harris Interactive Global Network of independent market- and opinion-research firms. EOE M/F/D/V

To become a member of the Harris Poll OnlineSM and be invited to participate in future online surveys, visit www.harrispollonline.com

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