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## Number of “Cyberchondriacs” – U.S. Adults Who Go Online for Health Information – Increases to Estimated 117 Million

5 | Volume  
8 | Issue  
July 28

2005

Despite a decrease over the last three years in the percentage of online U.S. adults who have ever searched the Internet for health-related information (from 80% in 2002 to 72% now), the actual number of adults who have ever searched for health information online (Harris Interactive refers to them as “cyberchondriacs”) has grown due to an increase in the percentage of U.S. adults who go online (from 66% in 2002 to 74% in 2005).

The percentage of cyberchondriacs who search sometimes or often appears to also be on the rise. Most adults who have ever looked for health information online have been generally successful in finding what they are looking for and believe the information to be at least somewhat reliable. Furthermore, many of these people use this information in their discussions with their doctors or use the Internet to help augment the information that doctors provide them.

These are some of the results of a nationwide Harris Poll of 1,015 U.S. adults surveyed by telephone by Harris Interactive between June 7 and 12, 2005.

Specifically the survey found

- The number of U.S. adults who have ever gone online to look for health or medical information has increased to approximately 117 million, up from about 111 million last year<sup>1</sup>. The main reason for this increase seems to be that the total number of Internet users has been increasing (from 69% of all U.S. adults in 2004 to 74% now). Cyberchondriacs now represent 72 percent of all online adults, down slightly from last year’s 74 percent.
- However, compared to last year, online adults appear to be searching the Internet for health-related information more frequently.
  - Almost six in 10 (58%) say that they have looked for information about health topics often (25%) or sometimes (33%), an increase of eight percentage points from 2004 (50%).

<sup>1</sup>Based on July 2004 U.S. Census estimate released January 2005 (220,000,000 total U.S. adults aged 18 or over.)

- The percentage who says they hardly ever search for health information has dropped to 14 percent, down from 24 percent last year.
- Eighty-five percent of those who have ever searched the Internet for health information have done so one or more times in the last month. This is up substantially from last year when 60 percent said that they had gone online one or more times in the past month looking for health information.
- On average, a cyberchondriac searches the Internet almost seven times per month, an increase from five times per month a year ago and three times per month four years ago in 2001.
- A large majority of cyberchondriacs (89%) indicate that they were successful in searching for health information online. Forty-six percent say that they were very successful and another 43 percent say they were somewhat successful. Among those cyberchondriacs who search for health information often, those saying they were very successful increased to 60 percent. Conversely, only a third (32%) of cyberchondriacs who hardly search for health information say that their searching was very successful.
- Nine in 10 (90%) cyberchondriacs say that the health information they found online has been reliable (37% “very reliable” and 53% “somewhat reliable”).

Cyberchondriacs are not only using the Internet to better educate themselves but many are also using it to assist in their discussion with their physicians. By 57 to 43 percent, a majority of adults who have gone online to get health information say that they have discussed this information with their doctor at least once. Furthermore, just over half (52%) of cyberchondriacs have searched for health information based on a discussion with their doctor.

Those who often use the Internet to find medical information are even more inclined to discuss this information with their doctor or to search for information based on a discussion with their doctor.

- Over half (53%) at least sometimes talk to their doctor about information that they found online.
- A higher 70 percent have gone to the Internet to look for presumably additional information to supplement what their doctors have told them.

**TABLE 1**  
**Cyberchondriacs: Trends**

	1998	1999	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Percent of all adults who are online*	38	46	63	66	67	69	74
Percent of all those online who have looked for health information	71	74	75	80	78	74	72
Percent of all adults who have looked for health information online	27	34	47	53	52	51	53
Percent of all adults who have looked for health information online <b>in last month</b>	NA	NA	27	32	NA	31	45
Estimated number of adults who have looked for health information online** (in millions)	54	69	97	110	109	111	117

Note: Percentages may not add up exactly to 100% due to rounding.

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

\*\* Based on July 2004 U.S. Census estimate released January 2005 (220,000,000 total U.S. adults aged 18 or over)

NA = Not Asked

**TABLE 2**  
**Frequency of Accessing Health Information Online: 1998-2005**

“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	2004	2005
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Often	12	13	16	18	17	19	25
Sometimes	30	30	30	35	37	31	33
Hardly ever	29	31	30	27	23	24	14
Never	29	26	25	20	22	26	29
Total who have looked for health or medical information <b>sometimes or often</b>	42	43	46	53	54	50	58
Total who have <b>ever</b> looked for health or medical information	71	74	75	80	78	74	72

Note: Percentages may not add up exactly to 100% due to rounding.

**TABLE 3**  
**Frequency of Looking for Health 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 information online

	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
	%	%	%	%	%
Not once	40	39	NA	21	14
<b>1 or more (NET)</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>NA</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>85</b>
1 or 2 times	29	34	NA	26	31
3 – 5 times	17	16	NA	14	29
6 – 9 times	3	2	NA	5	6
10 or more times	9	8	NA	15	19
Not sure	2	1	NA	19	1
Mean (average)	3.0	4.8	NA	5.1	6.8
Median	1.1	2.0	NA	2.0	3.0

Note: Percentages may not add up exactly to 100% due to rounding.  
NA = Not asked in 2003

**TABLE 4**  
**Successful in Searching for Information Online About Health Topics**

“How successful were you in your search for information online about health topics? Were you...?”

Base: Ever look for health information online

	Frequency of Looking for Health Information Online			
	Total	Often	Sometimes	Hardly
	%	%	%	%
Very successful	46	60	45	32
Somewhat successful	43	34	48	36
Neither successful nor unsuccessful	2	1	2	7
Somewhat unsuccessful	3	3	2	10
Very unsuccessful	3	2	2	8
Not sure/Decline to answer	3	1	1	7

Note: Percentages may not add up exactly to 100% due to rounding.

**TABLE 5**  
**Reliability of Searching for Information Online About Health Topics**

“How reliable do you believe this information is concerning health topics? Is it ...?”

Base: Ever look for health information online

	Frequency of Looking for Health Information Online			
	Total	Often	Sometimes	Hardly
	%	%	%	%
Very reliable	37	45	34	30
Somewhat reliable	53	49	57	48
Neither reliable nor unreliable	4	4	4	5
Somewhat unreliable	3	1	2	10
Very unreliable	2	1	1	2
Not sure/Decline to answer	1	-	1	4

Note: Percentages may not add up exactly to 100% due to rounding.

**TABLE 6**  
**Discussion With Doctor About Information Found Online**

“In the past year, have you ever discussed with your doctor the information you found online?”

Base: Ever look for health information online

	Frequency of Looking for Health Information Online			
	Total	Often	Sometimes	Hardly
	%	%	%	%
<b>Yes (NET)</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>33</b>
Yes, always do	15	24	11	4
Yes, sometimes do	25	29	25	12
Yes, have done once or twice	18	20	21	17
No, never do	43	27	42	66
Not sure/Decline to answer	*	-	1	1

Note: Percentages may not add up exactly to 100% due to rounding.

\*Less than 0.5 percent

**TABLE 7**  
**Frequency Of Searching Medical Information Online Based On Discussion With Doctor**  
“Have you ever searched for medical information on the Internet based on a discussion with your doctor?”

Base: Ever look for health information online

	Frequency of Looking for Health Information Online			
	Total	Often	Sometimes	Hardly
	%	%	%	%
<b>Yes (NET)</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>30</b>
Yes, often	17	26	14	3
Yes, sometimes	36	44	38	27
No, never	48	30	47	71
Not sure/Decline to answer	*	-	*	-

Note: Percentages may not add up exactly to 100% due to rounding.  
\*Less than 0.5 percent

Downloadable PDFs of the Harris Interactive *Healthcare News* are available at [http://www.harrisinteractive.com/news/newsletters\\_healthcare.asp](http://www.harrisinteractive.com/news/newsletters_healthcare.asp)

### Methodology

*The Harris Poll*® was conducted by telephone within the United States between June 7 and 12, 2005 among a nationwide cross section of 1,015 adults (aged 18 and over). Figures for age, sex, race, education, number of adults, number of voice/telephone lines in the household, region and size of place 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 overall results have a sampling error of plus or minus 3 percentage points of what they would be if the entire U.S. adult population had been polled with complete accuracy. Sampling error for those who have Internet access (764) and those who have ever looked for health information online (623) is higher and varies. 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 (nonresponse), 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.*

# Healthcare News

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## About Harris Interactive

Harris Interactive Inc. ([www.harrisinteractive.com](http://www.harrisinteractive.com)), the 15<sup>th</sup> largest market research firm in the world, is a Rochester, NY-based global research company that blends premier strategic consulting with innovative and efficient methods of investigation, analysis and application. Known for *The Harris Poll*<sup>®</sup> and for pioneering Internet-based research methods, Harris Interactive conducts proprietary and public research to help its clients achieve clear, material and enduring results.

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EOE M/F/D/V.

To become a member of the Harris Poll Online<sup>SM</sup> and be invited to participate in future online surveys, [www.harrispollonline.com](http://www.harrispollonline.com).

For more information, please contact us at:

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