

# The Average Person Has at Least 4 Health Issues

It's now considered 'normal' to live your life plagued with four or more health complaints.



[Dr. Joseph Mercola](#)



## STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- The average adult is battling at least four different health issues, such as back pain, headaches and seasonal allergies
- Not only did 82% of the adults surveyed have a minor health condition, but 59% said they were in “significant” pain or discomfort

- A significant number of those with multiple health conditions have trouble sleeping, have developed related mental health conditions and can't work as a result
- More than half of U.S. adults regularly take prescription medications, and the average adult takes four, increasing the risk of adverse drug reactions
- Many chronic health conditions and mental health problems can be remedied with healthy lifestyle changes

If you're currently healthy, count yourself lucky — and above average when it comes to the average adult battling at least four different health issues. The disturbing data was revealed by OnePoll, which conducted a survey — commissioned by infant formula manufacturer Perrigo — of 2,000 British adults.[1](#)

Not only did 82% of the adults surveyed have a minor health condition, but 59% said they were in “significant” pain or discomfort. Common conditions among those surveyed included back pain, headaches and seasonal allergies.

## Majority of Adults Suffering From Poor Health

The study casts light on the day-to-day realities for thousands of people, whose quality of life is suffering due to long-term poor health. For more than one-quarter of those surveyed, their health complaints have been ongoing for several years, while 8% said their health conditions have been present for more than a decade. The implications to daily life are immense. Among those surveyed who have health issues:[2](#)

- 46% have trouble sleeping
- 28% developed mental health conditions
- 18% can't work

The survey also revealed that many people (57%) are suffering in silence, trying to cope with their health conditions on their own because their doctor “doesn't seem interested” (28%). More than half of respondents also said they hadn't considered stopping in to a drugstore for help. Perhaps hinting at the root of the problem, 56% of the adults surveyed said that they weren't the best at self-care, and 43% said taking care of themselves wasn't a priority.[3](#)

Unfortunately, without attention paid to the foundational cause of these health complaints, those affected are likely to receive disjointed, sporadic care and fall into the trap of polypharmacy, or the use of multiple medications.

# Most US Adults Take Multiple Prescription Drugs

What goes along with a laundry list of health complaints? Typically, a laundry list of medications. A 2017 survey of nearly 2,000 U.S. adults by Consumer Reports found that more than half of U.S. adults regularly take prescription medications, and the average adult takes four.[4](#)

The rate of prescribing has been skyrocketing as well, even outpacing the rate of population increase in the U.S. The Consumer Reports survey found that the total number of prescriptions filled by Americans (including children) increased by 85% from 1997 to 2016 — but the total U.S. population increased by only 21% during that time.

If you visit a doctor in the conventional medicine system, the fact is that you're likely to be prescribed a medication. "About three-quarters of all visits to a physician end with a drug prescription," according to a report in the journal *Health Affairs*.[5](#) The U.S. FDA put the number at 64%.[6](#)

Either one is shocking, as is the fact that the average American adult takes four prescription drugs, and 75% of Americans take at least one over-the-counter drug regularly as well.[7](#) As the FDA notes, "ADRs [adverse drug reactions] increase exponentially with four or more medications."[8](#)

## Which Drugs Are Most Prescribed?

The most common drugs prescribed give clues about the most common health complaints. In 2018, researchers with Larkin University's College of Pharmacy compiled the top 200 prescribed drugs, along with their reported adverse reactions and black box warnings.[9](#) I'll focus on the top 20 here, which include:[10](#)

1. Lisinopril, an ACE inhibitor used to treat high blood pressure and heart failure.
2. Levothyroxine (Synthroid), a thyroid medication used to treat hypothyroidism.
3. Atorvastatin (Lipitor), a statin to treat high cholesterol.
4. Metformin (Glucophage), an antidiabetic drug used to treat Type 2 diabetes.
5. Simvastatin (Zocor), a statin to treat high cholesterol.
6. Omeprazole (Zegerid), a proton-pump inhibitor used to treat heartburn, stomach ulcers and gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD).
7. Amlodipine besylate (Norvasc), a calcium channel blocker to treat high blood pressure and chest pain (angina).
8. Metoprolol (Toprol XL), a beta blocker used to treat high blood pressure, chest pain and heart failure.

9. Acetaminophen/hydrocodone (Tylenol/Vicodin), a combination opioid analgesic used to relieve pain.
10. Albuterol (ProAir HFA), a bronchodilator used to treat asthma, bronchitis, emphysema and other lung diseases.
11. Hydrochlorothiazide (Microzide), a diuretic used to treat high blood pressure and fluid retention (edema).
12. Losartan (Cozaar), an antihypertensive drug used to treat high blood pressure.
13. Gabapentin (Neurontin), an anticonvulsant used to treat seizures, as well as pain and anxiety (an off-label use).
14. Sertraline (Zoloft), a selective serotonin reuptake inhibitor (SSRI) used to treat depression, obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD), posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), panic disorder and other mental health conditions.
15. Furosemide (Lasix), a diuretic used to treat fluid retention.
16. Acetaminophen (Tylenol), an analgesic used for pain relief.
17. Atenolol (Tenormin), a beta blocker used to treat high blood pressure and chest pain.
18. Pravastatin (Pravachol), a statin used to treat high cholesterol.
19. Amoxicillin, a penicillin antibiotic used to treat infections.
20. Fluoxetine (Prozac), an SSRI used to treat depression, OCD and other mental health conditions.

A range of adverse drug reactions were reported from the top 200 drugs, with the most common affecting the cardiovascular, gastrointestinal, respiratory, endocrine and immunological systems, among others. Common adverse reactions include the following — you'll notice some of the reactions are the same as some of the symptoms the drugs are intended to treat:[11](#)

- Chest pain
- Edema
- Thrombosis
- Headache
- Anxiety
- Depression
- Abdominal pain
- Alopecia
- Upper respiratory infections
- Allergic rhinitis
- Viral infections
- Fungal infections
- Tremor
- Joint swelling
- Anemia

- Renal insufficiency
- Urinary tract infection
- Impaired vision
- Tinnitus
- Hemorrhage
- Allergic conjunctivitis

## **Polypharmacy Carries Serious Risks**

If you suffer from multiple health conditions, your health is at risk not only from the illnesses but also from the multiple drugs prescribed to treat them. Adverse effects from polypharmacy are common and may drive patients to seek ever-more drugs to treat the side effects caused by their unsafe drug regimen. It's a vicious cycle, one that's perpetuated by a broken health care system that revolves around pharmaceutical-driven, fragmented care.

When medications are prescribed in excess, including to treat the side effects of other drugs, the patient's health suffers. "The use of numerous medications may result in medication-related problems such as inappropriate indications, therapeutic duplication, adverse effects, drug interactions, unnecessary medications, poor adherence, and a strain on health care resources," according to a featured article in *The Journal for Nurse Practitioners*.[12](#)

It also noted that polypharmacy is a preventable risk factor for hospital admission in older adults, due to adverse drug events. In *BMC Geriatrics*, adverse outcomes including mortality, falls, adverse drug reactions, increased length of hospital stay and hospital readmission are listed, and the risk of harm increases with the number of medications.[13](#) According to the systematic review:[14](#)

*"Harm can result due to a multitude of factors including drug-drug interactions and drug-disease interactions. Older patients are at even greater risk of adverse effects due to decreased renal and hepatic function, lower lean body mass, reduced hearing, vision, cognition and mobility."*

People over the age of 65 may be most at risk of polypharmacy's adverse effects. While 89% of people aged 65 and older take at least one prescription medication, 54% take four or more.[15](#)

Data from Merck similarly found that nearly 80% of older adults regularly take at least two prescription drugs while 36% regularly use five or more different drugs — and this doesn't include over-the-counter medications.[16](#) Adding to the risks, Merck stated, "Most drugs used by older people for chronic disorders are taken for years."[17](#)

## Even Children Are Being Overmedicated

While those over 65 tend to be the most medicated since they're more likely to have one or more chronic conditions,[18](#) even children are prescribed multiple, powerful drugs. In 2014, the Citizens Commission on Human Rights, a mental health watchdog group, highlighted data showing that in 2013:[19](#)

- 274,000 babies aged 1 and younger were given psychiatric drugs. Of these, 249,699 were on antianxiety meds like Xanax, 26,406 were on antidepressants such as Prozac or Paxil, 1,422 were on ADHD drugs such as Ritalin and Adderall, and 654 were on antipsychotics such as Risperdal and Zyprexa
- In the toddler category (2- to 3-year-olds), 318,997 were on antianxiety drugs, 46,102 were on antidepressants, 10,000 were prescribed ADHD drugs and 3,760 were on antipsychotics
- Among children aged 5 and younger, 1,080,168 were on psychiatric drugs

The situation isn't much better for teens. According to mail-order pharmacy Express Scripts, prescriptions for antidepressants for teenagers increased 38% from 2015 to 2019, while such prescriptions for adults rose 12% during that time.[20](#) Note that this was prior to the pandemic, during which social isolation and other fears may have pushed some children with mental health issues "over the edge."[21](#)

In 2021, more than one year into the pandemic, 1 in every 12 children under age 18 was on medication for ADD/ADHD, autism/ASD or difficulties with emotions, concentration or behavior, according to Psychology Today.[22](#)

"This includes 1.2% of preschoolers and 12.9% of 12- to 17-year-olds (1 in 8)," the magazine said, adding that even children as young as 2 "were being forced to take powerful antipsychotic drugs," mostly in conjunction with one or more other psychiatric drugs for "the particularly vague diagnosis of 'pervasive developmental disorder.'"

Being prescribed multiple psychotropic drugs to treat anxiety, depression or ADHD is incredibly common among youth. As noted in a study published in the journal Pediatrics in 2020, not only is the use of ADHD medication increasing but so is psychotherapeutic polypharmacy.[23](#)

From 2006 to 2015, prescriptions for ADHD medications among patients aged 2 to 24 years increased from 4.8% to 8.4%, while the percentage of those who were prescribed a drug for ADHD as well as at least one other medication rose from 26% to 40.7%.[24](#)

Most often, stimulants and  $\alpha$ -2 agonists were prescribed together to treat ADHD, while the most common psychotropic agents prescribed in addition were selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs) and second-generation antipsychotics (SGAs).

“Surprisingly,” the researchers noted, “SGAs were coprescribed with ADHD medications most frequently at visits in the youngest patients (2-5 years of age)” — possibly in an attempt to treat sleep difficulties.[25](#)

## Top Tips for Better Health

Many chronic health conditions and mental health problems can be remedied with healthy lifestyle changes. One powerful step to protect your health is to eliminate or drastically reduce linoleic acid in your diet. Linoleic acid is the primary fat found in polyunsaturated fatty acids (PUFAs), including vegetable/seed oils. When oxidized, it degenerates into compounds that are carcinogenic, thrombogenic, mutagenic and genotoxic.[26](#)

Linoleic acid is found in virtually every processed food, including restaurant foods, sauces and salad dressings, so to eliminate it you’ll need to eliminate most processed foods and restaurant foods from your diet.

Time restricted eating (TRE) is another powerful intervention. It mimics the eating habits of our ancestors and restores your body to a more natural state that allows a whole host of metabolic benefits to occur.[27](#)

TRE involves limiting your eating window to six to eight hours per day instead of the more than 12-hour window most people use. Research shows, for instance, that TRE promotes insulin sensitivity and improves blood sugar management by increasing insulin-mediated glucose uptake rates,[28](#) which is important for resolving Type 2 diabetes along with other metabolic health conditions.

Ideally, you’ll want to stop eating for several hours before bedtime, then start your eating window in mid- to late morning after you wake up. Remember, while it’s important to get back to the basics of eating whole foods, getting high-quality sleep, exercising and being active throughout your day and relieving stress, with each toxic exposure you remove from your life, the better health you’ll enjoy.

So along with adding in healthy elements, make a point to remove those that may be harming you, including toxic personal care and cleaning products, electromagnetic fields and unnecessary medications. When you address your health this way, on a holistic level, you can stay well and avoid polypharmacy at every life stage.

[Subscribe to Mercola Newsletter](#)

**Disclaimer:** *The entire contents of this website are based upon the opinions of Dr. Mercola, unless otherwise noted. Individual articles are based upon the opinions of the respective author, who retains copyright as marked.*

*The information on this website is not intended to replace a one-on-one relationship with a qualified health care professional and is not intended as medical advice. It is intended as a sharing of knowledge and information from the research and experience of Dr. Mercola and his community. Dr. Mercola encourages you to make your own health care decisions based upon your research and in partnership*

*with a qualified health care professional. The subscription fee being requested is for access to the articles and information posted on this site, and is not being paid for any individual medical advice.*

*If you are pregnant, nursing, taking medication, or have a medical condition, consult your health care professional before using products based on this content.*

[1 StudyFinds September 9, 2022](#)

[2 StudyFinds September 9, 2022](#)

[3 StudyFinds September 9, 2022](#)

[4 Consumer Reports August 3, 2017](#)

[5 Health Affairs September/October 2001](#)

[6 U.S. FDA, Preventable Adverse Drug Reactions](#)

[7 Consumer Reports August 3, 2017](#)

[8 U.S. FDA, Preventable Adverse Drug Reactions](#)

[9 Pharmacy \(Basel\). 2018 Jun; 6\(2\): 43](#)

[10 Pharmacy \(Basel\). 2018 Jun; 6\(2\): 43., Figure 1](#)

[11 Pharmacy \(Basel\). 2018 Jun; 6\(2\): 43., Figure 3](#)

[12 The Journal for Nurse Practitioners March 1, 2020](#)

[13 BMC Geriatr. 2017; 17: 230](#)

[14 BMC Geriatr. 2017; 17: 230](#)

[15 KFF August 9, 2019](#)

[16 Merck Manual July 2021](#)

[17 Merck Manual July 2021](#)

[18 Merck Manual July 2021](#)

[19 PR Web May 21, 2014](#)

[20 The New York Times August 27, 2022](#)

[21 UC San Diego Health February 3, 2021](#)

[22 Psychology Today August 17, 2021](#)

[23 Pediatrics \(2020\) 146 \(1\): e20192832](#)

[24 Pediatrics \(2020\) 146 \(1\): e20192832](#)

[25 Pediatrics \(2020\) 146 \(1\): e20192832](#)

[26 YouTube June 13, 2020](#)

[27 Science November 16, 2018; 362\(6416\): 770-775](#)

[28 Science November 16, 2018; 362\(6416\): 770-775](#)