

# Many Americans Recognize Risks Of Prescription Drugs, Polls Finds

By BECKEY BRIGHT March 3, 2008

Most Americans are concerned about potentially harmful interactions between pain medications and other prescription medications, a new WSJ.com/Harris poll shows, but many don't follow safety precautions.

The Wall Street Journal Online/Harris Interactive health-care poll conducted Feb. 19- 21 found that more than half U.S. adults surveyed believe the abuse of prescription medications is as great a problem as abuse of illegal drugs, while 22% think illegal drug abuse is a bigger problem and 18% think prescription-drug abuses is a bigger problem.

Media reports that actor Heath Ledger's death might be linked to an overdose of prescription medications helped draw attention in recent weeks to the issue of prescription-drug abuse and the dangers of harmful drug interactions. The U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration estimates that nearly 7 million Americans abuse prescription drugs, up 80% since 2000. And nearly one in 10 high-school seniors admit to abusing such powerful prescription pain killers, according to the DEA.

But a large percentage of adults surveyed still haven't put in place the safeguards that might help avoid potential problems, the poll indicates.

When getting a new prescription, 59% said they always or often check for information about potential risks associated with the medication, compared with 25% who do so sometimes, and 17% who said they rarely or never check for risks. About half said they always or often talk to their doctor about other prescription drugs they are taking and 25% talk with their pharmacist. But more than a quarter said they never talk to their doctor about other prescriptions and more than half said they don't talk to their pharmacist.

And while nearly half of respondents said they always or often keep their prescription medications where others cannot access them, 24% said they never keep them safeguarded and another third said they do so only sometimes or rarely.

At the same time, nearly a third admit to having shared their prescription medications with family members at some point or taking higher doses of medications than prescribed by their doctor, although most say they have done these activities only sometimes or rarely.

See full results of the poll below:

**"Based on what you know or have heard, which do you think poses a bigger problem in the U.S. - people abusing prescription medications or illegal drugs?"**

*Base: All adults*

	Total
Abusing illegal drugs	22%
Abusing prescription medications	18
Both equally	52
Not sure	7

\* \* \*

**"Based on what you know or have heard how concerned are you about...?"**

*Base: All Adults*

	Very/Somewhat (NET)	Very Concerned	Somewhat Concerned	Not At All/Not Very (NET)	Not Very Concerned	Not At All Concerned	Not Sure
The potential side-effects of prescription pain medications	79%	38%	41%	18%	12%	6%	3%
Potentially harmful interactions between prescription pain medications and other prescription medicines	82	41	41	15	11	5	3
The risk of addiction associated with some prescription pain meds	70	34	36	27	19	8	3

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

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**"How often do you personally do the following?"**

*Base: All Adults*

	<b>Always/Often (Net)</b>	Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
Keep your prescription medications where others can't access them	<b>46%</b>	29%	17%	15%	16%	24%
Keep a paper or electronic record of all the prescription medications you take regularly (i.e., how many, how often and what dosages)	<b>32</b>	22	10	13	12	43
Share prescription medications with other members of your family	<b>2</b>	*	2	10	20	69
Take higher doses of prescription pain or other medications than prescribed by your doctor	<b>1</b>	*	1	9	20	70

\* = Less than 0.5 percent.

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

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**"When you are prescribed a new prescription drug, how often do you personally...?"**

*Base: All Adults*

	<b>Always/Often (Net)</b>	Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
Talk to your doctor about other prescription drugs you are taking	<b>56%</b>	35%	20%	22%	9%	14%
Talk to your doctor about over-the-counter medicines that you are taking	<b>41</b>	22	19	30	13	16

Talk to your doctor about nutritional or herbal supplements you are taking	<b>29</b>	16	12	23	16	32
Talk to a pharmacist about other prescription drugs you are taking	<b>25</b>	12	12	29	20	27
Talk to a pharmacist about over-the-counter medicines that you are taking	<b>19</b>	8	11	29	23	29
Talk to a pharmacist about nutritional or herbal supplements you are taking	<b>13</b>	5	8	19	22	47
Look for information about the potential risks associated with the medication	<b>59</b>	31	27	25	8	9

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

### **Methodology**

Harris Interactive conducted this online survey within the U.S. on Feb. 19- 21, 2008 among a national cross section of 2,027 adults. Figures for age, gender, race/ethnicity, education, income and region were weighted where necessary to align with population proportions. Propensity score weighting was also used to adjust for respondents' propensity to be online.