



DRUG LABEL SURVEY 2026

A national survey of 600 U.S. adults examined how people read and follow prescription and over-the-counter drug labels. The results reveal widespread gaps in understanding that may contribute to medication misuse, dosing errors and overlooked safety warnings.



Medication labels are important safety tools, but they are often skimmed, misunderstood or ignored altogether. Our survey of 600 U.S. adults found that many Americans make medication decisions based on habit, symptom relief or personal judgment rather than strictly following label instructions. The findings reveal how common everyday behaviors can increase the risk of dosing mistakes, drug interactions and avoidable health complications.

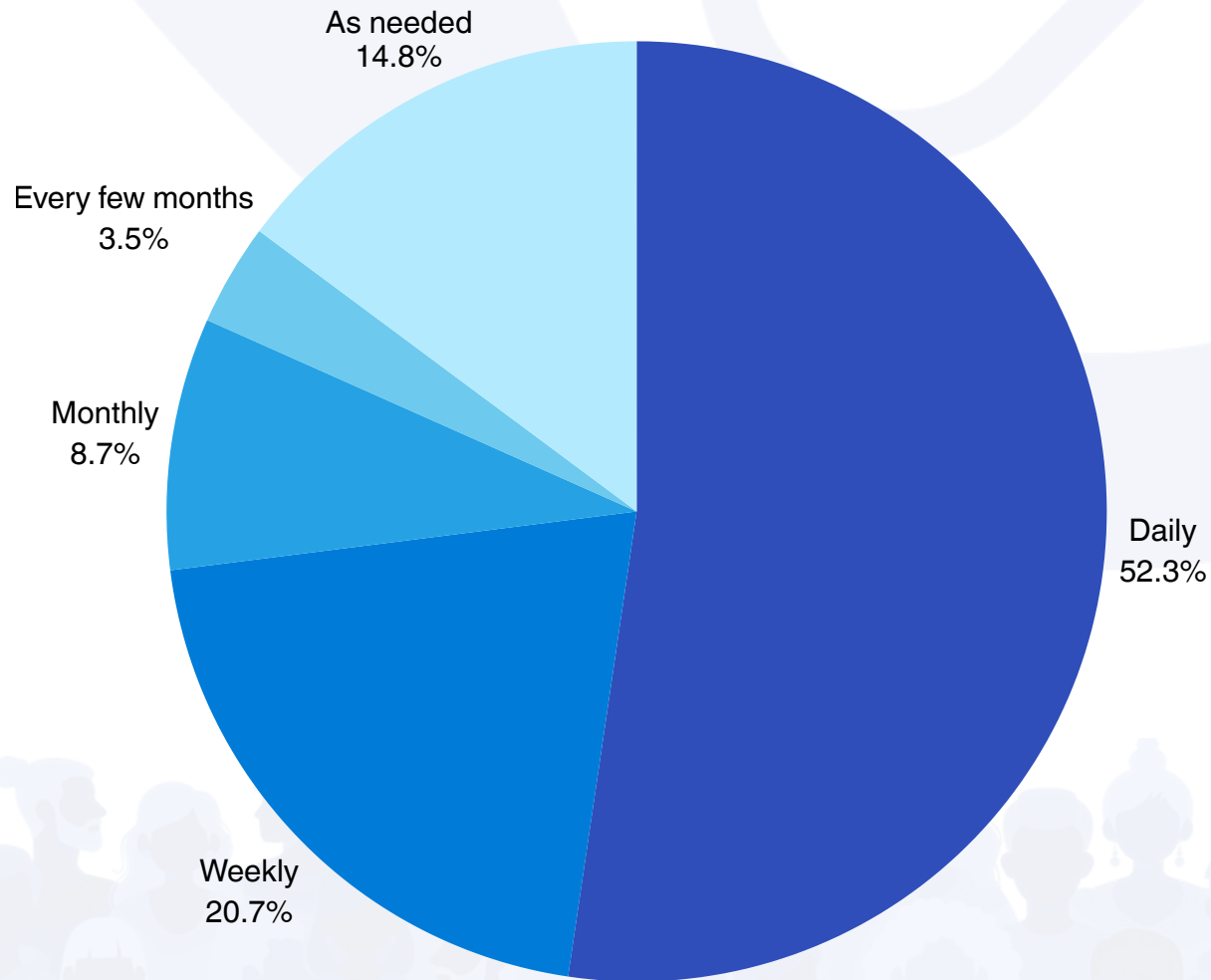


“When it comes to critical safety alerts, if only 1 in 3 Americans has ever heard of them, the warning is not doing its job.”

— Whitney Ray Di Bona, Esquire

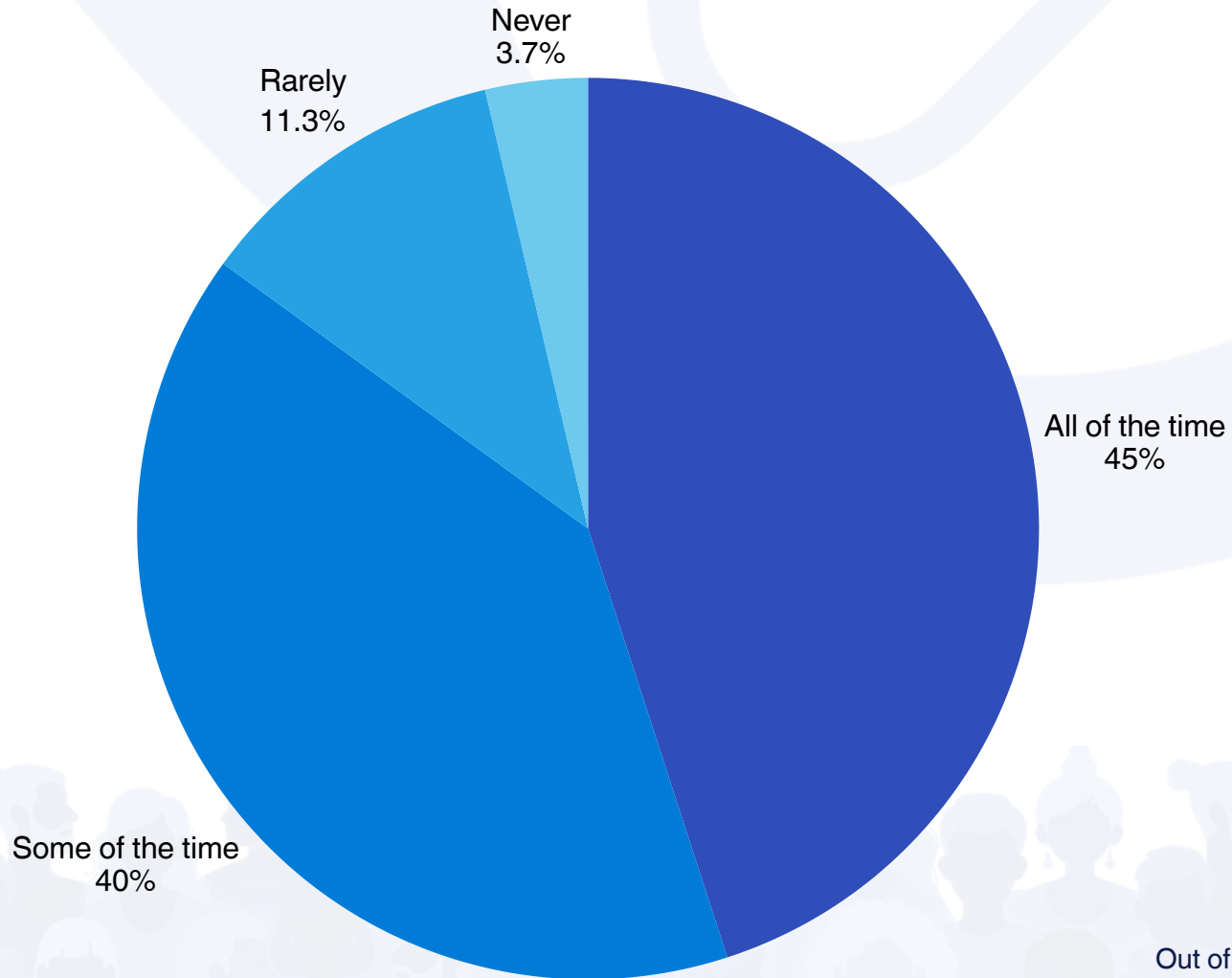
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1. How often do you take over-the-counter (OTC) or prescription medications? Select the option closest to your situation.



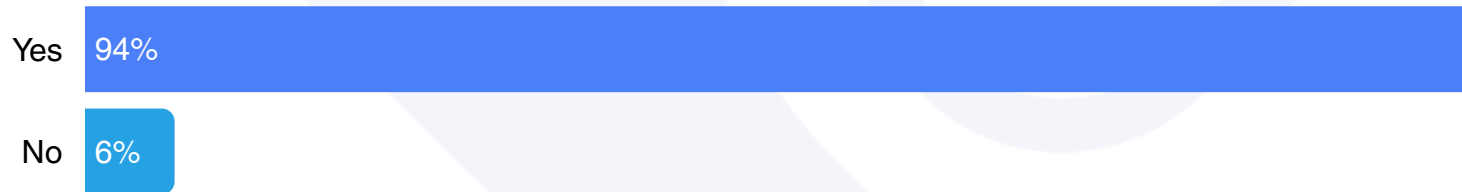
Out of 600 respondents

2. When you take a medication, how often do you thoroughly read the drug's label and side effect information?



Out of 600 respondents

3. Do you read and adhere to the dosage limits and directions on over-the-counter medications?

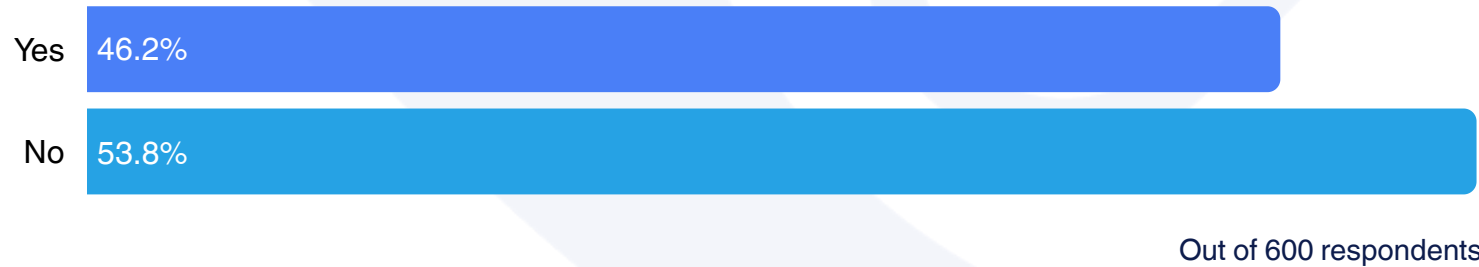


Out of 600 respondents

While most OTC medications are safe to use, they can still interact with each other or cause side effects. Consider OTC hazards that often go overlooked:

- Duplication of ingredients
- Drug interactions
- Acetaminophen toxicity

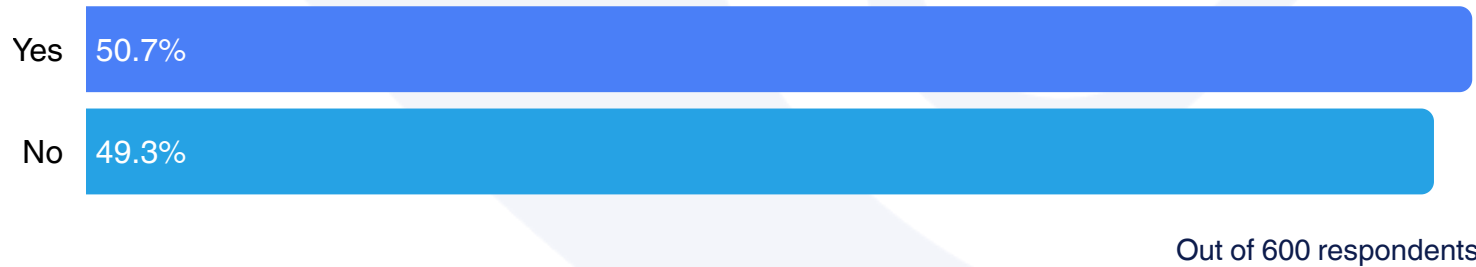
4. Have you ever taken a medication more often than the label directs—for example, not waiting the recommended four to six hours between doses of Advil?



Dosage deviations are not usually random, but tend to fall into recurring patterns in everyday medication use:

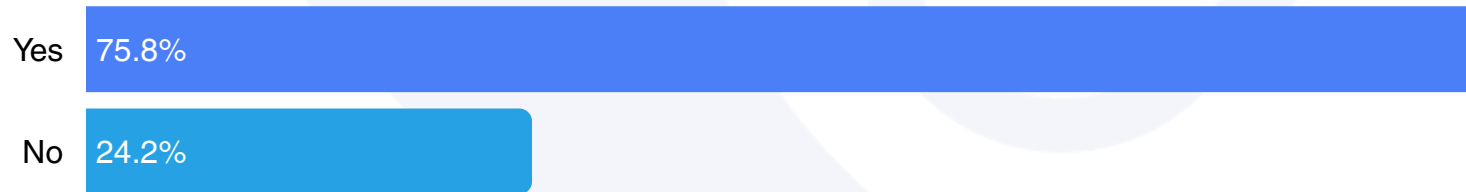
- **Exceeding dosage limits:** Taking more than recommended when symptoms persist or relief is delayed
- **Taking doses too close together:** Not accurately tracking timing between doses
- **Skipping doses due to side effect concerns:** Delaying or missing doses after reading the warning information on the label

5. Do you believe there are fewer risks for over-the-counter medications compared to prescription medications?



Both prescription and over-the-counter labels contain critical safety information that helps prevent dosing errors, interactions and avoidable side effects. Taking a few extra moments to review key sections can significantly reduce the risk of misuse.

6. When taking a new medication, do you research potential interactions with other drugs or medications you may be taking?



Out of 600 respondents

When patients receive a new prescription, they are often given a pharmacy information sheet outlining key details about the medication, including usage instructions, potential side effects and safety warnings.

7. Have you ever decided against taking a medication because of potential side effects or warnings?



Out of 600 respondents

According to a study published in the **Journal of General Internal Medicine**, 18% of outpatient adults taking prescription medications reported experiencing a drug complication or side effect.

8. Which medication(s) did you decide against taking and why?

"Birth control because I had experienced the negative side effects."

"A blood pressure medication because of reviews of others that took it."

"I was offered an anti seizure medication that had an ingredient that causes akathisia."

"Pain medication because I used to be addicted to it."

"Weight loss medications and anxiety meds."

"Decided against antibiotics due to mild symptoms and potential side effects."

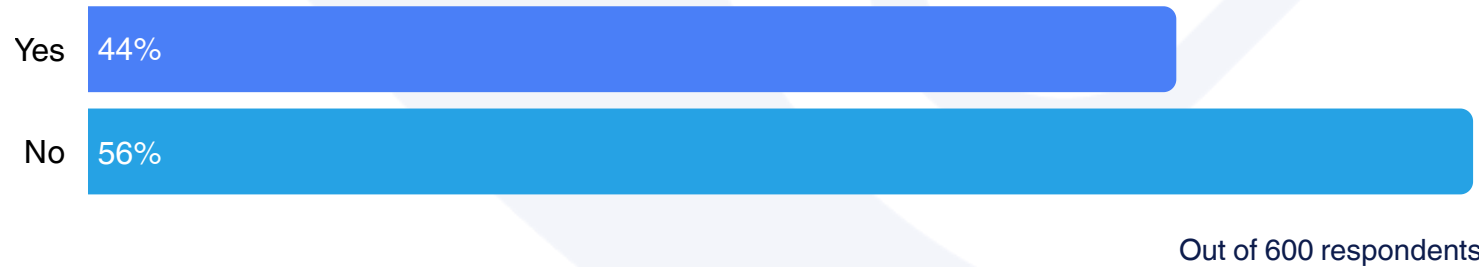
"An asthma inhaler because it had contraindications to a medication I was taking."

"I don't recall what it was, I just know I didn't take it when I read the side effects."

"Statins because of side effects."

"It was an antidepressant but had tinnitus as a side effect."

9. Have you ever stopped taking a prescribed medication before you were supposed to or before the course of medication was complete?



Incorrect or incomplete use of medications can also increase the risk of toxicity, particularly with drugs like acetaminophen, where the margin between safe and harmful dosing is narrow.

10. Why did you stop taking the medication early?

“Because I ended up feeling better and the doctor said It was okay.”

“Because it was making me overweight.”

“It made me feel absolutely horrible.”

“Because of side effects they were causing.”

“It did not feel right. I would faint and feel tingly in my brain.”

“I was worried about addiction risks and no longer felt I needed it.”

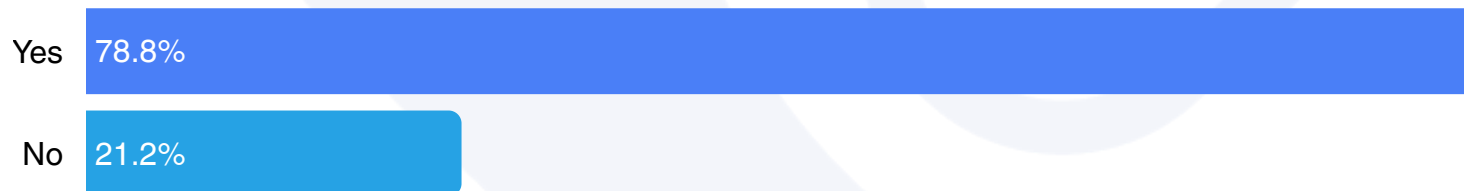
“Side effects were too severe.”

“I switched to a different one.”

“Experienced mild side effects early.”

“The information I found suggested it was rushed to market.”

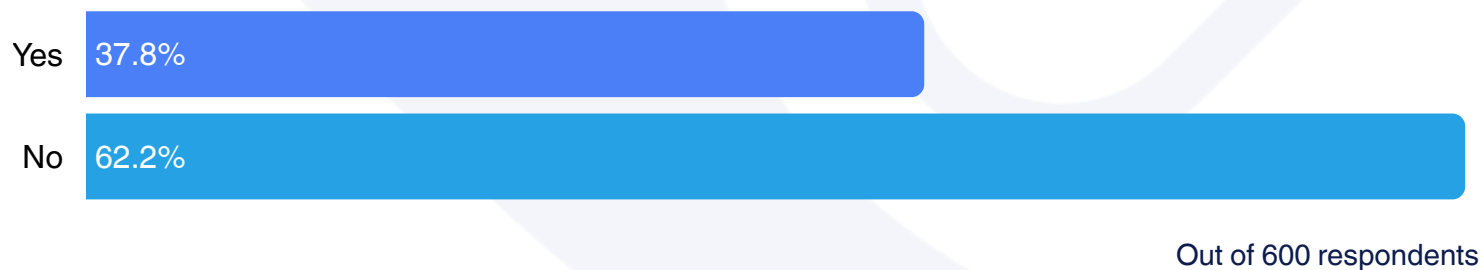
11. Do you read or review the pharmacy information sheet you receive when you are prescribed medication?



Out of 600 respondents

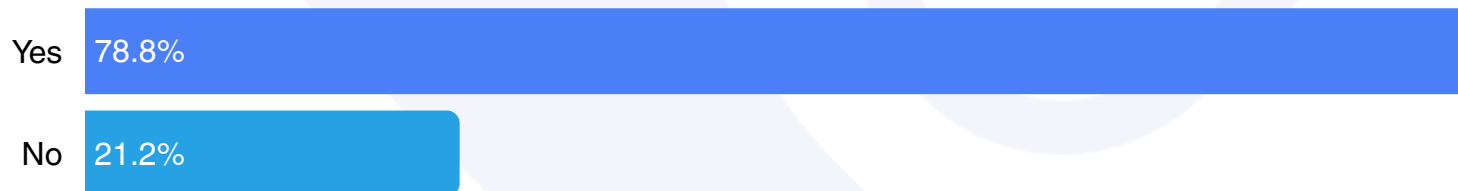
Drug information sheets can serve as important reinforcement tools, especially for complex medication or those with significant side effects and interactions.

12. Do you know what a black box warning (boxed warning) is on a drug label?



A black box warning is the FDA's most stringent warning for drugs and medical devices on the market. Black box warnings, or boxed warnings, alert the public and health care providers to serious side effects, such as injury or death. The FDA requires drug companies to add a warning label to medications that have a black box warning.

13. Has a black box warning ever convinced you not to take a medication or drug?



Out of 600 respondents

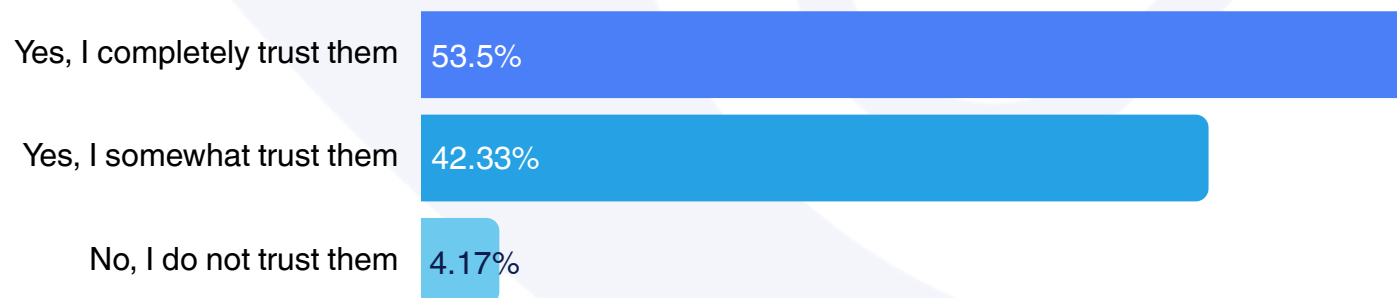


“Black box warnings exist because a drug poses a real risk of serious harm or death. That is as serious as it gets from a regulatory standpoint.”

Whitney Ray Di Bona, Esquire

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14. Do you trust your doctor and pharmacy to provide you with all the information you need to safely take a medication?



Out of 600 respondents

Pharmacists are a key but often underused resource in medication safety. It is important to consult doctors or pharmacists with drug safety information when:

- Starting a new medication while already taking others
- Unsure whether two medications or supplements are safe to combine
- Experiencing side effects that feel more severe than expected
- Considering stopping a medication early

15. Why do you or don't you trust prescribing doctors and pharmacists to provide you with all the safety information you need?

"I trust them cause they are professionals."

"I've seen disasters with doctors prescribing meds that were counter indicated."

"Because they went through many years of school to be where they are."

"Big pharmacy is too big and history shows they can be corrupt."

"They have always given me good advice."

"I believe in the expert opinion."

"I trust them somewhat. But humans make mistakes."

"Have to do your own research too."

"Reputable, established relationship, honest, address questions and concerns."

"They just want money."

A widespread gap exists between consumer confidence and actual medication safety. While many believe they follow instructions, 45% of adults misread drug labels, and nearly half shorten recommended dosing intervals. Furthermore, 61% avoid starting prescribed treatments due to side-effect fears, while only 38% recognize critical FDA black box warnings, highlighting dangerous gaps in everyday health literacy.



“The problem is not that patients are careless. It is that we have built a drug safety system that hides its most critical information in a document most people throw away without opening.”

— Whitney Ray Di Bona, Esquire

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For more surveys and information on dangerous drugs and devices, explore [drugwatch.com](https://www.drugwatch.com)