



National Prescribing Service Limited

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NPS Annual Consumer Surveys: findings about complementary medicines use

The annual surveys of consumers conducted by NPS investigate consumers' knowledge, attitudes, awareness and behaviour around medicine use and NPS Programs. The 2006 and 2008 consumer surveys included questions regarding complementary medicines.

Complementary medicines are also known as traditional, natural or alternative medicines and include herbal medicines, vitamin and mineral supplements, other nutritional supplements, traditional medicines such as Ayurvedic medicines and traditional Chinese medicines and homoeopathic medicines. (Note: In these surveys, complementary medicines were referred to as 'herbal or natural remedies' as consumers are more familiar with this terminology.)

Key findings from the consumer surveys (2006, 2008):

- Around two thirds of respondents have used one or more complementary medicine in the previous 12 months, with 28% of the respondents reporting using them on a regular basis during this time. ([Table 1](#))
- 89% of respondents had used at least one complementary medicine in the last month with most reporting having used between one and four products in the month. ([Table 2](#))
- Consumers were asked whether they considered the following to be medicines: Chinese herbal remedies, fish oil and echinacea.
 - 43% of respondents considered Chinese herbal remedies to be medicines, while 49% disagreed that they were a 'medicine'
 - 30% respondents agreed that fish oil was a medicine, while 67% disagreed that it was a medicine
 - Only 25% respondents thought echinacea was a medicine, 49% reported it was not a 'medicine' and 26% were undecided.
- More than 60% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that complementary medicines may interfere with other medications.
- Of respondents who had a medicines list, 26% reported that their complementary medicines were included in the list.
- 58% of respondents who were taking a complementary medicine reported the use of that medicine to their doctor or pharmacist when they were given a new prescription medication.
- Respondents who reported using a complementary medicine in the last 12 months were asked if they discussed this with anyone before taking it. Thirty percent of respondents did not discuss it with anyone. Most respondents discussed it with family and friends (20%) a doctor (18%), a pharmacist (12%) and an alternative medicine practitioner (11%). ([Table 3](#))



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Table 1: Frequency of complementary medicines use, NPS consumer survey, 2006 (n = 1233) and 2008 (n = 2505)

Use of CMs in last 12 months	2006 Survey %	2008 Survey %
Regularly	32.5	35.1
Occasionally	19.2	16.2
Rarely	15.8	20.1
Never	32.4	28.4

Table 2: Number of types of complementary medicines used in past month, NPS consumer survey 2008 (n = 1215)

Number of types of complementary medicines used in past month.	Occasional or regular users of complementary medicines %
0	11.3
1	29.2
2	27.4
3	15.6
4	7.0
5	4.4
6	3.2
7-19	1.6
20-36	0.4

Table 3: Discussion before taking a new complementary medicine, NPS consumer survey 2008 (n = 1622)

Discussed before taking a new complementary medicine	All respondents who have used a complementary medicine in last 12 months %
No one	30.5
GP or doctor	17.9
Pharmacist / chemist	11.7
Health shop assistant	4.6
Naturopath / herbalists / homeopath	11.0
Family / friend	19.5
Nurse	0.4
Someone else	0.9
Other medical practitioners	0.8
Work colleague	0.1
Can't say	6.0

NB: Multiple responses allowed