

40% of American Adults Report Difficulty Swallowing Pills

Following are excerpts from a January, 2004 article presented online by Yahoo!, Inc. via PRNewswire:

National Survey Shows Many Failed to Take Medication as Directed Because of Difficulty Swallowing Pills

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Pill Swallowing Difficulties

Results of a first-ever nationwide survey of adults on pill-swallowing difficulties, conducted by Harris Interactive, reveal that a large percentage (40%) of American adults have experienced difficulty swallowing pills, even though most have had no problems swallowing food or liquid. Of those who experience difficulty swallowing their medications, 14 percent have delayed taking doses of their medication, 8 percent have skipped a dose and 4 percent have discontinued using their medication.

Another surprising finding is that fewer than one quarter of adults who have difficulty swallowing their medication have ever discussed the problem with a health professional. For a scant 14 percent of these patients surveyed, their health professional brought up the topic of pill-swallowing difficulty, and only ten percent initiated the conversation themselves.

The online survey of 679 adults (513 ages 18-64, 166 age 65 and older), through an educational grant funded by Schwarz Pharma, Inc., probed the scope, rationale, coping strategies and consequences of the problem:

Some key findings are:

- Nearly one in five people who have taken oral medications have hesitated prior to taking pills because they thought they might have trouble swallowing them. Most people who have hesitated attribute their hesitation to the size of the pill (84%), followed by its shape (29%).
- One in ten people have chosen pills, other than a vitamin, based on the anticipation of how difficult they might be to swallow. Women are more likely to do so (14%) than men (4%).
- To facilitate swallowing, more than half (55%) of those who have had difficulty swallowing pills drink lots of liquids, 48% drink water in big gulps, 43% tilt their heads back, and 31% place the pill on the back of their tongue. Some of the other coping strategies are trying more than once to swallow the pill (30%), splitting the pill in two (17%), and taking a deep breath before taking the pill to minimize the gag reflex (13%).
- About twice as many women (51%) as men (27%) experienced pill-swallowing problems, and interestingly, more people between ages 18 and 64 reported having these problems (44%) than those age 65 and older (26%).
- Most people that had problems taking pills described the sensations as having a pill stuck in their throat (80%), having a bad after taste in their mouth (48%), or gagging (32%).

Alternative Forms of Medication

People are trying alternative forms of medication, such as chewable or rapidly-dissolving tablets. For the majority of people who are unsure or somewhat likely to try orally dissolving technology, the factors with the greatest importance underlying their decision are the ability to easily transport their pills (80%), ease of administration (78%), and no need for preparation (76%), followed by no need for water when swallowing pills (65%) and better taste of the pill (61%).

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