



# **A New Look at the Awareness and Use of Personal Medication Records: Five Years Later**

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**Data Collected by Social Science Research Solutions (SSRS)  
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## Executive Summary

In an effort to learn more about adults' awareness and use of personal medication records—and to determine if levels of awareness and use have increased in the past five years—in June 2010 AARP Research & Strategic Analysis fielded a short telephone survey among a nationally representative sample of 1,077 adults ages 45 and older.

### Key Findings

- Slightly more than one-quarter of respondents said they had heard of a personal medication record (PMR), and among those who had heard of one, more than half said they have one. Of those who said they had a personal medication record, nearly seven in ten reported carrying a completed record with them either *always* or *sometimes*. In contrast, nearly one-quarter said they never carried their completed personal medication record with them, and another one in fourteen said they did so *rarely*.
- Notably, the percentages of respondents who have either heard of a PMR or who have a PMR have not changed since 2005. But, among respondents who have a personal medication record, there has been a change in the frequency of their carrying one, with roughly six in ten respondents in the 2010 study saying they *always* carry one compared to slightly less than half of the respondents who reported the same practice in the 2005 study.
- When asked why they do not always carry a personal medication record even though they have one, nearly four in ten respondents said they believed they *don't need it* or *it's not necessary*. The next three most frequent reasons, cited by fewer than one-quarter of respondents, were that they *don't think about it*, they *don't take many medications*, or they *carry it when they need to, such as to a doctor's appointment or while traveling*.
- In terms of their use of over-the-counter medications, nearly half of respondents reported taking between one and three over-the-counter medications (including vitamins and supplements) on a regular basis. One in eight said they take four or five, and one in ten said they take six or more over-the-counter medications regularly. In contrast, nearly three in ten said they do not take any.
- When asked about prescription drugs, slightly more than one-third of respondents said they took between one and three prescription drugs on a regular basis. One in seven said they take four or five, while one-fifth said they take six or more prescription medications regularly. In contrast, roughly one-quarter said they do not take any.

### Conclusions

Awareness and use of personal medication records are both still relatively low among U.S. adults ages 45 and older, with only about one-quarter aware of them and slightly more than one-half of those actually using them. However, among respondents who have a personal medication record, reported usage has become more frequent with about six in ten PMR "owners" *always* carrying them, suggesting they are more committed about having it with them. And, not surprisingly, PMR usage is directly related to the number of prescription drugs taken by an individual.

## Background

In June 2010, AARP Research & Strategic Analysis contracted with Social Science Research Solutions (SSRS) to field a telephone survey among a nationally representative sample of U.S. adults ages 45 and older to learn more about their awareness and use of personal medication records. Given that similar questions were asked in a previous AARP survey in the fall of 2005, it was hoped that comparisons in awareness and usage would determine the extent to which these measures have changed over time.<sup>1,2</sup>

In this survey, respondents were asked if they had ever heard of a personal medication record. Those who did were then asked about their own use of such a record. All respondents to the survey were also asked about the number of over-the-counter and prescription medications they take regularly.

## Detailed Findings<sup>3</sup>

### *Awareness and Use of Personal Medication Records*

Slightly more than one-quarter (26%) of respondents said they had heard of a personal medication record, and among those who had heard of one, more than half (53%) said they have one. Of those who said they had a personal medication record, nearly seven in ten (69%) reported carrying a completed record with them either *always* (59%) or *sometimes* (10%). In contrast, nearly one-quarter (23%) said they never carried their completed personal medication record with them, and another one in fourteen (7%) said they did so *rarely*.

- Women are more likely than men (29% vs. 22%) to say they have heard of a personal medication record, but there is no gender difference in the percentage of respondents who say they have one. In contrast, while there is no age difference in the percentage of respondents who have heard of a PMR, respondents ages 65 and older are more likely than those ages 45-64 (63% vs. 48%) to say they have one.

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<sup>1</sup> See L.A. Skufca, *Awareness and Use of Personal Medication Records Among 50+ Americans*. Washington, DC: AARP, January 2006.

<sup>2</sup> Telephone interviews were conducted from June 16-27, 2010 among a representative sample of adults ages 45 and older. A random-digit-dial (RDD) sample was used to ensure the survey is representative of the target population. Weights were applied to ensure the sample reflects U.S. Census statistics for adults ages 40+ by age within sex and region criteria. The sampling error for the general population is +/- 3 percentage points at the 95% confidence level. This means that in 95 out of 100 samples of this size, the results would fall in a range of no more than 3 percentage points of what would have been obtained if every person age 45 or older had been surveyed.

<sup>3</sup> Respondents in this study are aged 45 and older, with two-thirds (67%) between the ages of 45 and 64 and one-third (33%) ages 65 and older. Slightly more than half are women (53%) and slightly less than half are men (47%). Roughly eight in ten (78%) are white, non-Hispanic; one in nine (11%) are black, non-Hispanic; six percent are Hispanic. More than four in ten had a high school education (32%) or less (11%), while roughly one-quarter (27%) had some college or technical training and roughly three in ten had a college (18%) or post-graduate education (11%). Three in ten (30%) have household incomes of less than \$30,000 per year, while slightly less than one-fifth (16%) have household incomes of \$30,000-\$49,999 per year. Eleven percent reported an annual household income of \$50,000-\$74,999, while roughly one-fifth (22%) reported an annual household income of \$75,000 or more.

As shown in Table 1, the percentage of respondents who have heard of a personal medication record (PMR) has not changed since 2005 (27% vs. 26%). Further, the percentage of respondents who have a PMP has also not changed since 2005 (60% vs. 53%)<sup>4</sup>. But, among respondents who have a personal medication record, there has been a change in the frequency of their carrying one, with roughly six in ten (59%) respondents in the 2010 study saying they *always* carry one compared to slightly less than half (46%) of the respondents who reported the same practice in the 2005 study.

<b>Table 1</b>		
<b>Percentage of Respondents who have Heard of a Personal Medication Record<sup>5, 6</sup></b>		
	<b>2005 (n=1,023)</b>	<b>2010 (n=1,077)</b>
Yes	27%	26%
No	72%	73%
Don't Know	1%	1%

<b>Table 2</b>		
<b>Percentage of Respondents who have a Personal Medication Record</b>		
	<b>2005 (n=298)</b>	<b>2010 (n=276)</b>
Yes	60%	53%
No	40%	46%
Don't Know	----	1%

<b>Table 3</b>		
<b>Frequency of Carrying a Completed Personal Medication Record Among those who have a Personal Medication Record</b>		
	<b>2005 (n=179)</b>	<b>2010 (n=147)</b>
Always	46%	<b>59%</b>
Sometimes	<b>22%</b>	10%
Rarely	10%	7%
Never	22%	23%

<sup>4</sup> Although the “eye ball” method of detecting statistical significance suggests a change in ownership in PMRs since 2005, a z-test of proportion requires a difference of +/- eight percentage points between two samples of roughly 300 respondents. For two samples, one with roughly 200 respondents and one with roughly 150 respondents, a difference of +/- eleven percentage points is necessary for a statistically significant difference (as is noted in Table 3).

<sup>5</sup> In the 2005 survey, respondents were read the following statement at the beginning of the survey: *A personal medication record is a form for recording all of the medications you take (the dose, the type, the reason for use, the time, etc...) including over-the-counter medicines. Typically the form allows you to include your doctors' and pharmacists' names and telephone numbers.*

<sup>6</sup> In the 2010 survey, respondents were read the following statement at the beginning of the survey: *A personal medication record is a list of all the medications you take (the dose, the type, the reasons for use, the time, etc...) including over-the-counter medicines. Typically the list includes your doctors' and pharmacists' names and telephone numbers.*

When asked why they do not always carry a personal medication record even though they have one, nearly four in ten respondents (36%) said they believed they *don't need it* or *it's not necessary*. The next three most frequent reasons cited by respondents were that they *don't think about it* (9%), they *don't take many medications* (8%), or they *carry it when they need to, such as to a doctor's appointment or while traveling* (6%).

	<b>2005 (n=89)</b>	<b>2010 (n=60)</b>
Doctor/hospital has my records	2%	3%
I don't take many medications	3%	8%
I don't need it / it's not necessary	11%	36%
I know what my medications are	1%	3%
I'm not away from home often / long	3%	4%
I carry my medications with me	2%	1%
I don't think about it	13%	9%
I forget to carry the record with me	3%	5%
It has personal / private information	4%	2%
I carry it when I need to (doctor's appt / when traveling)	14%	6%
I don't always have my purse / wallet with me	2%	5%
It's inconvenient (too big)	6%	3%
Other	5%	8%
Don't know/refused	5%	11%

### ***Use of Over-the-Counter Medications***

Nearly half (46%) of respondents reported taking between one and three over-the-counter medications (including vitamins and supplements) on a regular basis. One in eight (13%) said they take four or five and one in ten (10%) said they take six or more over-the-counter medications regularly. In contrast, nearly three in ten (28%) said they do not take any.

- Men are more likely than women (33% vs. 23%) and respondents ages 45-64 are more likely than those ages 65 or older (30% vs. 23%) to report not taking any over-the-counter medications.
- Notably, respondents at both ends of the income scale—those with annual household incomes of less than \$25,000 and those with annual household incomes of \$75,000 or more—are more likely to report not taking any over-the-counter medications regularly than are those with incomes between \$25,000 and \$49,999 (32% and 31% vs. 22%).

### ***Use of Prescription Medications***

When asked about prescription drugs, slightly more than one-third (36%) of respondents said they took between one and three prescription drugs on a regular basis. One in seven (15%) said they take four or five, while one-fifth (20%) said they take six or more prescription medications regularly. In contrast, roughly one-quarter (26%) said they do not take any.

- Men are more likely than women (23% vs. 17%) to say they take six or more prescription drugs on a regular basis.
- Further, respondents ages 65 or older are more likely than those ages 45-64 to say they take 4-5 (22% vs. 11%) or six or more (24% vs. 18%) prescription drugs on a regular basis. Notably, respondents ages 45-64 are more likely than those ages 65 or older to report not taking any prescription drugs (33% vs. 14%).
- In terms of income differences, less affluent respondents—those with annual household incomes of less than \$25,000—are more likely than their more affluent counterparts to report taking six or more prescription drugs on a regular basis (31% vs. 20% for those with incomes between \$25,000-\$49,999; 14% with incomes between \$50,000-\$74,999; and 11% for those with incomes of \$75,000 or more).
- Additionally, respondents with incomes of \$75,000 or more are more likely than those with incomes of less than \$25,000 (44% vs. 30%) to report taking 1-3 prescription drugs regularly.

Perhaps not surprisingly, as shown in Table 5, there is a clear relationship between the frequency of one's carrying a completed personal medication record and the number of prescription drugs he or she regularly takes.

	None	1-3	4-5	6+
Frequency of Carrying a Completed PMR				
Always	4%	29%	21%	44%
Sometimes	10%	55%	10%	20%
Rarely	-----	55%	9%	27%
Never	8%	42%	19%	25%

## Conclusions

Awareness and use of personal medication records are both still relatively low among U.S. adults ages 45 and older, with only about one-quarter aware of them and slightly more than one-half of those actually using them. However, among respondents who have a personal medication record, reported usage has become more frequent with about six in ten PMR “owners” *always* carrying them, suggesting they are more committed about having it with them. And, not surprisingly, PMR usage is directly related to the number of prescription drugs taken by an individual.

## Appendix A: Annotated Questionnaire

**Survey on Personal Medication Records**  
(n=1,077 45+ / weighted data)

A personal medication record is a **list of** all the medications you take (the dose, the type, the reasons for use, the time, etc...) including over-the-counter medicines. Typically the **list includes** your doctors' and pharmacists' names and telephone numbers.

Question 1: Have you ever heard of a personal medication record before?

Yes	26%
No	73%
Don't Know	1%

<Asked of respondents who have heard of a personal medication record, n=276>

Question 2: Do you have a personal medication record?

Yes	53%
No	46%
I don't know	1%

<Asked of respondents who have a personal medication record, n=147>

Question 3: How often do you carry a completed personal medication record with you?

Always	59%
Sometimes	10%
Rarely	7%
Never	23%

<Asked of respondents who have ever heard of, who have, and who carry a personal medication record with them *sometimes, rarely, or never*, n=60>

Question 4: Why don't you always carry your personal medication record with you? [DO NOT READ LIST.]

Doctor/hospital has my records	3%
I don't take many medications	8%
I don't need it / it's not necessary	36%
I know what my medications are	3%
I'm not away from home often / long	4%
I carry my medications with me	1%
I don't think about it	9%
I forget to carry the record with me	5%
It has personal / private information	2%
I carry it when I need to (doctor's appt / when traveling)	6%
I don't always have my purse / wallet with me	5%
It's inconvenient (too big)	3%
Other	8%
Don't know/refused	11%

<Asked of total respondents, n=1,077>

Question 5: How many over-the-counter medications (that is, those you don't need a prescription for, including vitamins and supplements)...how many over-the-counter medications do you take on a regular basis?

1-3	46%
4-5	13%
6 or more	10%
I don't take any over-the-counter medications on a regular basis	28%
Don't know/refused	2%

<Asked of total respondents, n=1,077>

Question 6: And how about prescription drugs....How many prescription drugs do you take on a regular basis?

1-3	36%
4-5	15%
6 or more	20%
I don't take any prescription drugs on a regular basis	26%
Don't know/refused	4%

### **Demographic Characteristics**

We're almost finished. I just have a few additional questions that I'd like to ask for classification purposes.

What is your age as of your last birthday? \_\_\_\_\_ years

45-64	67%
65+	33%

Are you male or female?

Male	47%
Female	53%

Are you or your spouse or partner currently a member of AARP?

Yes	36%
No	61%
Don't Know	2%

What is your current marital status?

Married	59%
Widowed	13%
Divorced	11%
Separated	4%
Never married	12%

What is the highest level of education that you completed?

Less than high school	11%
High school graduate	32%
Some college or technical training beyond high school	27%
College graduate	18%
Post-graduate or professional degree	11%

Which of the following best describes your current employment status?

Employed or self-employed <u>full-time</u>	35%
Employed or self-employed <u>part-time</u>	10%
Retired and not working	36%
Unemployed and looking for work	7%
Other such as homemaker	4%

What best describes your race?

White, non-Hispanic	78%
Black, non-Hispanic	9%
Hispanic	6%

Households are sometimes grouped according to income. Please indicate which group best estimates your annual household income before taxes. (*Check only one.*)

Less than \$10,000	6%
\$10,000 to \$19,999	12%
\$20,000 to \$29,999	12%
\$30,000 to \$39,999	9%
\$40,000 to \$49,999	7%
\$50,000 to \$74,999	11%
\$75,000 or more	22%
Don't know/refused	17%

***Thank you very much for your time. Your responses are important to us!***