# Study reveals widespread self-diagnosis using the internet in the UK



A recent study involving 2,000 adults has revealed the widespread practice of self-diagnosing illnesses using the internet, with significant implications for public health understanding. The research found that the average person in the UK will self-diagnose approximately 1,202 illnesses and ailments over their lifetime, with this behaviour occurring around twice a month. Among younger adults, this frequency increases to roughly three times a month.

The study, conducted by Bluecrest, examined how people seek health information online, showing a heavy reliance on search engines, while 15 per cent of respondents use medical websites and artificial intelligence (AI) platforms to check symptoms. Over half of those polled admitted to having self-diagnosed an illness, yet a third later discovered their diagnosis was incorrect. These errors often became apparent only through subsequent test results (38 per cent), consultations with healthcare professionals (38 per cent), or hospital visits (34 per cent).

Dr Martin Thornton, chief medical officer at Bluecrest, highlighted the risks associated with relying solely on online sources for health information. Speaking to Wales Online, he said: "Although it's useful to find out what symptoms might mean and get a quick answer, the outcomes can cause more worry than it's worth. We shouldn't solely accept what we read online, particularly when the source isn't backed up by reliable, expert-led research."

The motivation for turning to the internet includes seeking immediate answers, reassurance, and attempts to anticipate future symptoms. However, the study also found that 34 per cent of people believed that researching health concerns online often leads to the most alarming conclusions, while 40 per cent felt it could result in further complications down the line. This concern led one in five participants to seek professional advice after being alarmed or frightened by what they had found online. Nonetheless, on average, individuals waited six days before consulting a healthcare professional, potentially delaying appropriate medical intervention.

In response to the findings, Bluecrest has introduced a Health IQ tool designed to improve public health intelligence. Dr Thornton explained: "We created the Health IQ because we believe health intelligence has never been more important, in this world of growing misinformation. We hope our tool can help change that, making people more aware of their health knowledge, and encouraging them to take proactive steps to understand their bodies better." He further noted the gaps in knowledge revealed by the research, particularly around general wellbeing, nutrition, and various health conditions, emphasising the importance of being informed about one's health status to enable more effective treatment and prevention.

The Bluecrest study sheds light on the scale of online self-diagnosis in the UK, illustrating both the demand for accessible health information and the challenges this practice poses in terms of accuracy and timeliness of professional healthcare intervention.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

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