



# Gut Check: Know Your Medicine

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## Pain Sufferers Risking Overdoses, National Survey Finds Search for Fast Relief with OTC Medicines Often Backfires, Gastroenterologists report

**Bethesda, MD (Jan. 25, 2016)** — Many Americans who turn to over-the-counter (OTC) medicines for chronic pain relief are routinely ignoring medicine labels, according to physician and consumer surveys released by the American Gastroenterological Association (AGA). This practice puts people at risk of overdose which can lead to serious side effects such as stomach bleeding, ulcers, liver damage, among other complications, and even death.

“Pain is incredibly personal, but taking more than the recommended dose of OTC pain medicine can cause significant stomach and intestinal damage among other complications,” said Byron Cryer, MD, councillor-at-large, AGA Institute and associate dean, The University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center, Dallas.

AGA commissioned the *Gut Check: Know Your Medicine* survey, conducted online by Harris Poll in September-October 2015 among 1,015 U.S. adults aged 30+ (“consumers”) and 251 U.S. gastroenterologists, and said the issue is concerning because chronic pain affects about 100 million American adults, according to a 2011 Institute of Medicine report.

Key findings include:

- Many gastroenterologists report a majority of their chronic pain patients are using medicines at a higher dose and for a longer duration than recommended and often don’t connect the overdose symptoms to the OTC pain medicines.
- Most chronic pain sufferers (66 percent) have been experiencing pain for two years or more, though only about one in 10 (12 percent) have been diagnosed with chronic pain by a health-care professional.
- More than two in five (43 percent) chronic pain sufferers said they knowingly have taken more than the recommended dose at some point.
- Many chronic pain sufferers believe the directions on the labels of OTC pain medicine are really just guidelines — stating they know what works best for them (43 percent).
- Many consumers do not know that combining two or more nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drug (NSAID) pain relievers (38 percent) or two or more acetaminophen products (38 percent) increases the risk of serious health complications when taking OTC pain medications.

Americans living with chronic pain can get relief safely, but it is important to work with a health-care professional to effectively manage chronic pain. Chronic pain should never be self-managed with OTC medicines. AGA recommends:

- Talk to your health-care professional about all the medicines you are taking.
- Read and follow all medicine labels
- Only take one product at a time containing the same kind of ingredient.

For an executive summary of the survey findings and to learn more, visit [gutcheckfacts.org](http://gutcheckfacts.org).

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### **About the Campaign**

*Gut Check: Know Your Medicine* is an educational campaign created by the American Gastroenterological Association, with sponsorship support from McNeil Consumer Healthcare, to motivate and encourage individuals to engage in the safe use of pain medicine.

### **Survey Method**

The *Gut Check: Know Your Medicine Survey* was conducted online by Harris Poll on behalf of the American Gastroenterological Association from Sept. 30 through Oct. 8, 2015, among 1,015 U.S. adults aged 30+ (“consumers”), including 479 who currently experience chronic pain (“chronic pain sufferers”), and 251 licensed gastroenterologists who are office- or clinic-based and see adult patients ages 18 years or older (“gastroenterologists”). The American Gastroenterological Association conducted this survey with sponsorship support from McNeil Consumer Healthcare. For complete research method, including subgroup sample sizes and weighting variables, please contact Sarah Beth Cloar.