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## SUPPLEMENTS, SAFETY, AND MISPERCEPTIONS: HOW AMERICANS UNDERSTAND NATURAL HEALTH PRODUCTS

**Fairleigh Dickinson University, June 28, 2018** – Natural or homeopathic products are used by a majority of Americans, and for a variety of reasons. Although the array of products that market themselves as natural or homeopathic are generally safe, they do bring with them the possibility for hurting those who take them, and the claims they make concerning their efficacy are often unfounded. Despite this, the Fairleigh Dickinson University Poll and the Fairleigh Dickinson University School of Pharmacy and Health Sciences' survey of Americans nationwide finds sizable numbers who believe the products are completely safe, tested by the FDA, and effective both in regard to treatment and prevention.

Over half (52%) have used medicine that is considered natural or homeopathic in the past year, including herbs, vitamins, and minerals. Two-thirds of those (68%) are currently taking a natural product. Americans find their way to natural products in a variety of ways, with physicians (33%) and family members or friends (35%) offering suggestions. Half (50%) say they found a product after reading, hearing, or seeing something about the product's usefulness in the consumer marketplace. And, when asked why they're taking natural products, a variety of reasons abound. Some put marijuana in that category and use it treat pain, while others say they prefer only natural products for their healthcare needs.

"With so many patients taking natural products, it's important that patients recognize the limitations and potential risks associated with these products. Dietary supplements contain ingredients that may have unintended effects, including on a pre-existing condition, or interact with current medications. Unlike prescription drugs, dietary supplement manufacturers are not required to prove they are safe and effective before marketing, and cases of tainted products causing harm have been reported," said Dr. Julie Kalabalik, assistant professor of pharmacy practice at the Fairleigh Dickinson University School of Pharmacy and Health Sciences in Florham Park, New Jersey.

The same survey finds that even though a majority of Americans hold accurate beliefs about the appropriate use of natural products, many do not, and education along with other demographic indicators provide insight into who needs to become better informed about natural medicine's usage.

When asked if a variety of diseases and illnesses are amenable to treatment and prevention through the use of natural medicine, opinion is divided.



With a few exceptions, around a third of all Americans believe natural products are helpful for preventing and treating cancer, heart disease, diabetes, obesity, and Alzheimer's. The greatest skepticism for natural medicine is around obesity and Alzheimer's.

"Our survey results reveal around one-third of all Americans believe natural products help treat serious medical conditions such as cancer. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has released warnings on their website regarding dietary supplements that claim to "cure" cancer. Product manufacturers that make such claims must obtain FDA approval first and subject their products to a review process. It is important for patients to be aware of misleading claims and false labeling. Patients should view any claims that sound too good to be true as red flags," said Kalabalik.

Not all Americans evaluate the efficacy of natural medicine the same. Whether one has health insurance and how much education they have helps to distinguish between those who believe in the usefulness of natural products. For example, four-in-ten (39%) of those without a college degree believe natural products are helpful in preventing cancer, as compared with 29 percent of those with college degrees. And almost half of those without health insurance (42%) believe in the efficacy of natural products when treating cancer, as compared with a third (32%) of those with health insurance.

Americans were also asked to evaluate the safety and degree of risk that one assumes when taking natural products. Most (63%) believe natural or homeopathic products can both hurt and help those who take them, with a quarter (27%) who believe the same products are unlikely to hurt the individual who takes them. As with attitudes toward the perceived efficacy of natural products, those who are educated and who have access to health insurance distinguish themselves from those with different life circumstances. Forty percent of those without health insurance say natural drugs are unlikely to hurt someone, as compared with 27 percent of those with health insurance. And a third (31%) of those without a college degree believe natural remedies are unlikely to hurt, with barely a quarter (24%) of those with a college degree saying the same.

Finally, although the vast majority of Americans know that natural products are not tested for safety by the Food and Drug Administration (64%), around one-in-five (22%) believe these products are tested just like prescription drugs. And, when asked if applying the term "natural" to a product means it is safe, a third (31%) say yes, with two-thirds (66%) disagreeing.

"It is important for patients to understand that when it comes to dietary supplements, the term 'natural' does not automatically mean the product is safe. Patients should speak to their pharmacist before initiating any dietary supplement. As the medication expert, the pharmacist can help the patient to understand the uses of the product and what side effects are possible and to assure there are no drug-supplement interactions," continued Kalabalik.

"Our survey results showed that patients most often turn to medical doctors and pharmacists when they have questions about natural and homeopathic products. However, half turn to information on the internet. Information found online can be misleading or false. It is important for patients to be aware of credible websites that they can turn to for accurate and reliable information on dietary supplements," said Kalabalik. She pointed to reliable information sources such as MedlinePlus, published by the National Institutes of Health.

"This survey reveals that many Americans use natural products. Half use a natural product because they heard, read, or saw information about the product's usefulness. Approximately one-third believe natural products can treat serious medical conditions such as cancer and that the term 'natural' means it is safe. These misconceptions represent an area where pharmacists and other healthcare professionals can educate patients about the benefits versus risks of using natural products and where they can find reliable information resources about these products," said Kalabalik.

**Methodology** - The Fairleigh Dickinson University Poll was conducted by landline and cellular telephone April 25 - May 1, 2018, using a random sample of adults nationwide aged 18 and older (N = 1001). Results have a margin of sampling error of +/- 3.9 percentage points, including the design effect.

Survey results are also subject to non-sampling error. This kind of error, which cannot be measured, arises from a number of factors including, but not limited to, non-response (eligible individuals refusing to be interviewed), question-wording, the order in which questions are asked, and variations among interviewers.

Interviews are conducted by Opinion America of Cedar Knolls, NJ, with professionally trained interviewers using a CATI (Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing) system. Random selection is achieved by computerized random-digit dialing. This technique gives every person with a landline phone number (including those with unlisted numbers) an equal chance of being selected.

The total combined sample is mathematically weighted to match known demographics of age, sex, and race. 432 interviews were conducted on landlines and 569 were conducted on cellular telephones.

The sample was purchased from Marketing Systems Group and the research was funded by Fairleigh Dickinson University.

For the second time, the FDU poll received an "A" rating from statistician Nate Silver's FiveThirtyEight blog. The ratings measure both accuracy and bias for all major polling services in the United States, providing an update to similar research the poll watchers conducted in 2014. FDU's "A" rating puts it in the top 15 of the more than 380 polling institutes reviewed and graded from A+ through F. The FDU poll was found to have a 94 percent accuracy rate for predicting election results, and is one of only three A-rated polling institutes with zero bias to their rankings.

## Tables

In the past year, have	In the past year, have you taken any medicine that's considered natural or homeopathic, this includes herbs, vitamins, and minerals.											
		G	ender	R	Race		Education		Age			
	All	Male	Female	White	Non-white	HS	College	18-34	35-55	55+		
Yes	52%	46	57	55	47	49	55	44	54	57		
No	48%	54	42	45	53	51	45	56	45	43		
DK (vol)	1%	1	1	1	0	1	0	0	1	1		
Refused (vol)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0		

In the past year, have you taken any medicine that's considered natural or homeopathic, this includes herbs, vitamins, and minerals.

		Has chron	nic condition	Has healt	h insurance	Self/other cancer diagnosis			
	All	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No		
Yes	52%	61	49	53	62	57	45		
No	48%	38	50	46	37	43	54		
DK (vol)	1%	0	1	1	1	0	1		
Refused (vol)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0		

Are you currently	y taking ar	ny medici	ine that's cor	nsidered natur	al or homeopath	<i>iic?</i> N =	= 519			
		G	ender	F	Race	Edu	ucation	Age		
	All	Male	Female	White	Non-white	HS	College	18-34	35-55	55+
Yes	68%	64	70	67	69	67	68	61	64	76
No	32%	35	29	32	30	32	31	39	36	22
DK (vol)	1%	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	2
Refused (vol)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Are you currently taking any medicine that's considered natural or homeopathic? $N = 519$											
		Has chro	onic condition	Has healt	h insurance	Self/other cancer diagnosis					
	All	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No				
Yes	68%	71	66	67	72	71	63				
No	32%	29	33	32	28	28	36				
DK (vol)	1%	0	1	1	0	1	0				
Refused (vol)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0				

How did you come to take natural or	homeonath	ia produ	ats 2 N - 34	51						
	lomeopui	Ge	ender $n = 30$	R	ace	Edu	ucation		Age	
	All	Male	Female	White	Non- white	HS	College	18-34	35-54	55+
Recommended by a physician	33%	33	33	28	23	29	36	24	34	36
Recommended by a family member/friend	35%	39	33	36	28	33	37	34	35	35
Recommended by a pharmacist	10%	13	7	17	13	8	12	21	5	8
Read/heard/saw something about product's usefulness	50%	42	55	47	66	50	50	47	46	54
Other	11%	9	12	9	7	12	9	19	8	8
DK (vol)	2%	2	2	3	0	4	1	0	3	2
Refused (vol)	1%	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0

How did you come to take natural	How did you come to take natural or homeopathic products? N = 351										
		Has chroni	c condition	Has health	insurance	Self/other cancer diagnosis					
	All	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No				
Recommended by a physician	33%	38	31	33	49	30	39				
Recommended by a family member/friend	35%	36	35	34	42	35	36				
Recommended by a pharmacist	10%	12	9	8	17	12	6				
Read/heard/saw something about product's usefulness	50%	48	50	50	51	49	50				
Other	11%	8	11	11	6	16	1				
DK (vol)	2%	5	1	0	2	1	3				
Refused (vol)	1%	0	1	0	1	1	0				

Can you briefly tell me why you take natural or homeopathic products? [Open-ended response] $N = 3$					
	All				
I don't trust prescription drugs	9%				
I've tried prescription drugs and they don't work for my condition	3%				
I prefer only natural	11%				
They enhance the effects of the prescription drugs I'm taking	4%				

They address the side effects that accompany the prescription drugs	4%
They help to prevent illness and disease	14%
Immune support	17%
Helps my heart	3%
Helps my mood	3%
Helps me sleep	3%
Other	51%
DK (vol)	1%
Refused (vol)	1%

In your opinion, does the term "natural" mean a medicine is safe?										
		Ge	ender	Race		Education		Age		
	All	Male	Female	White	Non- white	HS	College	18-34	35-54	55+
Yes	31%	28	33	27	39	34	28	36	26	30
No	66%	68	63	70	57	62	69	63	71	64
DK (vol)	4%	4	4	3	5	4	4	1	4	5
Refused (vol)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

In your opinion	, does the	e term "natu	ral" mean a me	edicine is safe?							
		Has chron	chronic condition Has health insurance Self/other cancer diagno								
	All	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No				
Yes	31%	34	30	32	34	30	32				
No	66%	61	67	68	67	66	65				
DK (vol)	4%	5	3	0	0	4	3				
Refused (vol)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0				

To the best of your knowledge, are natural or homeopathic products tested for safety by the Food and Drug Administration, just like prescription drugs?

1 1	0									
		Ge	ender	ŀ	Race	Education				
	All	Male	Female	White	Non-white	HS	College	18-34	35-54	55+
Yes	22%	21	24	16	33	28	18	29	16	23
No	64%	65	64	70	54	58	70	62	68	65
DK (vol)	13%	14	12	13	13	15	12	9	16	12
Refused (vol)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

To the best of your knowledge, are natural or homeopathic products tested for safety by the Food and Drug Administration, just like prescription drugs?

Just the preserve	inen an ugo							
		Has chroni	ic condition	Has health i	nsurance	Self/other cancer diagnosis		
	All	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	
Yes	22%	25	22	22	31	20	25	
No	64%	61	65	68	61	67	62	
DK (vol)	13%	13	13	14	8	13	13	
Refused (vol)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	

In general, do **prescription drugs** OR homeopathic or natural products [rotate] provide the most safety for patients, or does it depend on the condition or illness?

		Ge	ender	R	ace	Edu	ucation		Ag	e
	All	Male	Female	White	Non- white	HS	College	18-34	35-54	55+
Prescription drugs	7%	8	6	7	6	5	9	8	4	9
Homeopathic or natural products	4%	4	4	5	3	6	3	4	6	3
Depends	82%	78	85	81	84	82	82	83	83	79
DK (vol)	6%	9	4	7	5	8	5	4	6	8
Refused (vol)	1%	1	1	0	2	0	2	1	1	1

In general, do **prescription drugs** OR **homeopathic or natural products** [rotate] provide the most safety for patients, or does it depend on the condition or illness?

		Has chronic o	condition	Has health in	surance	Self/other can	cer diagnosis
	All	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Prescription drugs	7%	10	6	7	7	7	8
Homeopathic or natural products	4%	3	5	4	8	4	4
Depends	82%	79	82	86	79	83	80
DK (vol)	6%	8	6	6	4	6	6
Refused (vol)	1%	1	1	0	2	0	2

Which of the following statements best describes how you feel, even if neither is perfect: Natural or homeopathic products ARE	
UNLIKELY TO hurt someone OR Natural or homeopathic products CAN BOTH HURT AND HELP those who take them.	

						-			Age   8-34 35-54 55+   36 24 23   55 68 65	
		Ge	nder	]	Race	Edu	ucation		Age	
	All	Male	Female	White	Non-white	HS	College	18-34	35-54	55+
Can't hurt	27%	26	28	24	33	31	24	36	24	23
Can hurt	63%	62	63	66	55	57	67	55	68	65
Depends (vol)	5%	5	5	5	6	7	4	5	4	5
DK (vol)	5%	6	4	5	6	6	5	4	4	7
Refused (vol)	1%	1	1	1	0	0	1	1	0	1

Which of the follo UNLIKELY TO	Which of the following statements best describes how you feel, even if neither is perfect: Natural or homeopathic products <b>ARE UNLIKELY TO</b> hurt someone <b>OR</b> Natural or homeopathic products <b>CAN BOTH HURT AND HELP</b> those who take them.													
Has chronic condition Has health insurance Self/other cancer diagnosis														
	All	All Yes No Yes No Yes No												
Can't hurt	27%	26	28	27	40	25	29							
Can hurt	63%	62	63	66	56	64	61							
Depends (vol)	5%	8	4	6	1	6	4							
DK (vol)	5%	4	5	6	2	5	6							
Refused (vol)	1%	0	1	0	2	0	1							

If you have questions about natural or homeopathic products, please if each of the following are whom you'd likely turn for answers. [Che that apply]	tell me ck all
	All
Medical doctors	69%
Pharmacists	57%
Family/friend	38%
Health professional not a doctor	56%
Printed materials that comes with the product	41%
Info on the internet	51%
Other (vol)	1%
DK (vol)	1%
Refused (vol)	3%

In your opinion, do natural or homeopathic products help to prevent \_\_\_\_\_, or do they make no difference?

Cancer										
		Ge	nder		Race	Edu	ucation	Age		
	All	Male	Female	White Non-white		HS	College	18-34	35-54	55+

Help to prevent	33%	31	35	29	42	39	29	42	35	24
Make no difference	43%	43	42	44	41	41	45	45	38	47
Depends (vol)	7%	7	6	6	7	5	7	6	7	6
DK (vol)	17%	19	16	21	10	15	19	7	20	22
Refused (vol)	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1

Cancer							
		Has chroni	c condition	Has health	insurance	Self/other cancer diagnosis	
	All	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Help to prevent	33%	28	35	32	42	33	34
Make no difference	43%	46	42	43	42	44	41
Depends (vol)	7%	5	7	7	5	6	7
DK (vol)	17%	21	16	18	12	17	18
Refused (vol)	0	0	0	0	0	1	0

Heart disease											
		Gender Race Education									
	All	Male	Female	White	Non-white	HS	College	18-34	35-54	55+	
Help to prevent	39%	40	39	38	43	41	38	42	45	32	
Make no difference	36%	36	36	35	38	37	35	41	28	40	
Depends (vol)	7%	7	6	8	4	5	8	6	8	6	
DK (vol)	18%	17	18	19	14	17	18	10	20	22	
Refused (vol)	0	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	0	1	

Heart disease							
		Has chroni	c condition	Has health i	nsurance	Self/other can	er diagnosis
	All	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Help to prevent	39%	36	41	38	49	40	39
Make no difference	36%	38	36	36	38	34	38
Depends (vol)	7%	5	7	7	1	7	6
DK (vol)	18%	21	16	18	12	18	17
Refused (vol)	0	0	0	0	0	1	0

Diabetes										
		Ge	ender	Race		Education		Age		
	All	Male	Female	White	Non-white	HS	College	18-34	35-54	55+
Help to prevent	31%	30	32	37	40	35	28	34	34	25
Make no difference	43%	43	43	43	42	42	43	49	36	45
Depends (vol)	7%	8	6	6	7	5	8	6	8	6
DK (vol)	19%	19	19	23	11	17	21	10	22	23
Refused (vol)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1

Diabetes											
		Has chroni	c condition	Has health	insurance	Self/other cancer diagnosis					
	All	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No				
Help to prevent	31%	27	33	30	39	32	31				
Make no difference	43%	43	43	42	47	42	43				
Depends (vol)	7%	8	6	7	1	6	7				
DK (vol)	19%	21	18	20	13	19	19				
Refused (vol)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0				

Obesity

		Ger	Gender		Race		Education		Age		
	All	Male	Female	White	Non-white	HS	College	18-34	35-54	55+	
Help to prevent	28%	28	28	27	30	31	25	31	30	22	
Make no difference	50%	49	51	49	53	48	52	54	45	53	
Depends (vol)	7%	7	6	7	6	5	8	5	8	6	
DK (vol)	15%	15	15	17	11	15	15	9	17	18	
Refused (vol)	1%	1	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	

Obesity								
		Has chron	nic condition	Has healt	h insurance	Self/other cancer diagnosis		
	All	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	
Help to prevent	28%	32	26	26	39	28	28	
Make no difference	50%	47	51	51	47	51	49	
Depends (vol)	7%	6	7	7	4	6	8	
DK (vol)	15%	14	15	16	8	14	16	
Refused (vol)	1%	0	1	0	0	1	0	

Alzheimer's											
		Ge	ender	Race		Education		Age			
	All	Male	Female	White	Non-white	HS	College	18-34	35-54	55+	
Help to prevent	24%	21	27	22	28	29	20	31	23	19	
Make no difference	43%	46	40	44	42	41	45	48	36	48	
Depends (vol)	6%	6	6	6	7	6	6	8	7	4	
DK (vol)	26%	26	27	28	23	24	29	14	35	29	
Refused (vol)	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	

Alzheimer's								
		Has chro	onic condition	Has heal	th insurance	Self/other cancer diagnosis		
	All	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	
Help to prevent	24%	27	23	24	23	25	23	
Make no difference	43%	40	45	43	44	44	42	
Depends (vol)	6%	3	7	6	7	6	7	
DK (vol)	26%	30	25	27	26	25	28	
Refused (vol)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	

In your opinion, are natural or homeopathic drugs effective or not effective [rotate] when treating \_\_\_\_\_

Cancer										
		Gender		Race		Education		Age		
	All	Male	Female	White	Non-white	HS	College	18-34	35-54	55+
Effective	33%	31	35	27	44	41	26	39	37	24
Not effective	40%	41	39	43	36	36	44	43	37	42
Depends (vol)	6%	5	7	7	4	5	7	6	6	7
DK (vol)	19%	21	18	22	14	18	20	9	21	26
Refused (vol)	1%	2	1	1	2	0	2	2	0	1

Cancer								
		Has chro	onic condition	Has health in	surance	Self/other cancer diagnosis		
	All	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	
Effective	33%	28	35	32	46	34	32	
Not effective	40%	45	39	41	32	41	40	
Depends (vol)	6%	5	7	7	3	6	6	
DK (vol)	19%	21	19	19	19	19	20	
Refused (vol)	1%	1	1	1	2	1	2	

Diabetes										
		Ge	Gender		Race		Education		Age	
	All	Male	Female	White	Non-white	HS	College	18-34	35-54	55+
Effective	37%	37	37	30	50	44	32	43	40	29
Not effective	37%	34	39	39	33	33	39	40	31	40
Depends (vol)	6%	6	6	7	5	5	6	3	8	6
DK (vol)	20%	22	18	24	11	18	21	13	21	24
Refused (vol)	1%	1	1	1	1	0	2	1	0	1

Diabetes								
		Has chroi	nic condition	Has health ir	surance	Self/other cancer diagnosis		
	All	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	
Effective	37%	36	38	36	50	38	36	
Not effective	37%	37	36	38	22	36	38	
Depends (vol)	6%	7	6	6	7	6	6	
DK (vol)	20%	19	19	20	20	20	19	
Refused (vol)	1%	1	1	1	2	1	1	

Heart disease										
		Ge	Gender		Race		Education		Age	
	All	Male	Female	White	Non-white	HS	College	18-34	35-54	55+
Effective	38%	38	38	35	44	41	36	40	41	34
Not effective	36%	35	37	37	36	35	37	41	31	38
Depends (vol)	6%	6	7	7	6	6	7	6	8	5
DK (vol)	19%	21	17	21	13	18	19	12	20	22
Refused (vol)	1%	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	0	2

Heart disease								
		Has chron	ic condition	Has health ir	isurance	Self/other cancer diagnosis		
	All	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	
Effective	38%	35	40	37	52	40	36	
Not effective	36%	41	35	38	22	35	37	
Depends (vol)	6%	6	7	7	5	6	7	
DK (vol)	19%	18	19	18	21	18	19	
Refused (vol)	1%	1	1	1	0	1	1	

Obesity										
		Gen	Gender		Race		Education		Age	
	All	Male	Female	White	Non-white	HS	College	18-34	35-54	55+
Effective	33%	34	32	29	39	39	28	37	37	5
Not effective	44%	42	45	44	45	40	47	47	39	47
Depends (vol)	6%	5	7	7	4	4	6	5	8	5
DK (vol)	17%	19	16	20	12	15	19	12	17	22
Refused (vol)	1%	0	1	1	1	0	1	0	0	1

Obesity							
		Has chronic condition		Has health insurance		Self/other cancer diagnosis	
	All	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Effective	33%	30	34	31	47	32	34
Not effective	44%	48	42	45	33	45	42
Depends (vol)	6%	5	6	6	5	6	6
DK (vol)	17%	16	18	17	15	17	17
Refused (vol)	1%	1	1	1	0	1	1

Alzheimer's										
		Gender		Race		Education		Age		
	All	Male	Female	White	Non-white	HS	College	18-34	35-54	55+
Effective	25%	24	27	21	33	31	20	34	22	20
Not effective	42%	45	40	43	42	38	47	44	39	45
Depends (vol)	5%	3	7	6	4	6	5	7	5	5
DK (vol)	27%	27	26	29	21	26	27	15	34	29
Refused (vol)	1%	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	0	2

Alzheimer's							
		Has chronic condition		Has health insurance		Self/other cancer diagnosis	
	All	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Effective	25%	24	26	24	34	26	24
Not effective	42%	47	41	43	38	41	44
Depends (vol)	5%	3	6	5	5	5	5
DK (vol)	27%	26	27	27	24	27	26
Refused (vol)	1%	1	1	1	0	1	1

## Weighted Sample characteristics

Male	49%			
Female	51%			
Democrat (with leaners	)	37%		
Republican (with leane	rs)	36%		
Independent		22%		
Other/DK/Refused		5%		
18-34	30%			
35-54	33%			
55+	35%			
Refused	2%			
White	64%			
African-American	11%			
Latino	15%			
Asian	79	%		
Other/refused	39	%		