

Nearly 1 in 10 adults skips meds due to cost, CDC says

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Not taking medications as prescribed can have serious health consequences, experts note.

(HealthDay)—Nearly one in 10 American adults don't take their medications as prescribed because they can't afford to, health officials reported Thursday.

High drug costs in the United States may be hurting the very people the medications are meant to help, the new report from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention suggests.

About 15 percent of U.S. adults have asked their doctor for a lower-cost alternative, the researchers found. Moreover, almost 2 percent have bought prescription drugs from another country—where medications may or may not be regulated—and more than 4 percent have tried

alternative therapies.

"These people are skipping doses, taking less medication or delaying filling prescriptions," said report author Robin Cohen, a health statistician at CDC's National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS).

Not taking medications as prescribed can have serious consequences, said co-author Maria Villarroel, chief of the special projects branch at NCHS.

"People who do not take their medication as prescribed have more hospitalizations, [emergency room visits](#) and an increased burden of their illness," Villarroel said.

Skimping on [prescription drugs](#) because of financial concerns was seen at every age, but much more so in people younger than 65. They were nearly twice as likely to not take their medications to save money as people aged 65 and older (8.5 percent versus 4.4 percent).

Whereas more than 5 percent of 18- to 64-year-olds skipped doses or took less medication to save money, those tactics were practiced by fewer than 3 percent of people aged 65 and older.

Also, delaying filling a prescription to cut expenses was reported by about 7 percent of 18- to 64-year olds, and about 3 percent of those aged 65 and older, the report found.

The researchers used data from the 2013 National Health Interview for the report and published the findings as a *NCHS Data Brief*. Overall, they found, 7.8 percent of adults admitted not taking medication as recommended because of high costs.

Insurance was a key factor in whether patients took their medications as

prescribed, the researchers found. Among adults younger than 64, about 6 percent with private insurance skipped medications to save money, compared with 10.4 percent of those with Medicaid and 14 percent of uninsured patients.

The poorest adults—those with incomes below 139 percent of the poverty level (about \$27,300 for a family of three last year)—were most likely to not take medication as prescribed because of limited finances, the researchers said.

"Poor adherence to prescribed medication use is a significant problem with potentially serious consequences," agreed Dr. David Katz, director of the Yale University Prevention Research Center.

For many medications, it makes sense for public and private insurers to remove all barriers to access and, if anything, add incentives, Katz said.

"Failure to use an important medication portends complications, a bad outcome and higher costs," Katz said. "The patient, the payer, and potentially the public, all lose in this scenario. Removing financial disincentive is a good place to start."

The U.S. Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services suggests the following ways patients can [save money](#) on drugs:

- Take generic or other lower-cost medications,
- Choose an insurance plan that has additional drug coverage,
- Consider drug assistance plans offered by pharmacies and states,
- Apply to Medicare and Social Security for help reducing costs,
- Apply to community-based charities for help with medication costs.

More information: For tips on reducing drug costs, visit the [U.S.](#)

[Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services.](#)

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