

Original Article

Self medication practice among adults of Ahmedabad city

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Abstract :

Background: Medication of oneself without professional supervision so as to alleviate an illness or a condition is self medication.

Objectives: To study the practice of self medication and the common ailments, common drugs used for self medication, their sources and the reasons for it.

Methods: Cross sectional qualitative study.

Study sample: 200

Exclusion criteria: Any person (i) below 18 years and (ii) above 18 years who refused to consent for the sharing of information.

Results: In the study 63% were males and 37% were females. Proportion of the participants practicing self medication was 82%. Fever (42.5%), headache (30.30%), and common cold (24.24%) were common illnesses for which self medication was practiced. Commonly used drugs for self medication were Paracetamol (43.64%), Aspirin (16.97%), Ibuprofen (12.12%) and Cetirizine (12.73%). Frequency of using this drugs were SOS (as and when required) by 86% and weekly by 5% and monthly by 9%. In 60% cases, friends were the source of information for self medication, media in 35.8% and internet in 4.2% cases. 56% of people perceived improvement in health after self medication. Saving time (52%) and saving money (60%) were the major reasons for self medication.

Conclusions: Self medication is found to be a common practice and the main reason behind this practice is saving money and time.

Key words: Self medication, over the counter drugs (OTC), urban area.

Introduction:

Self-medication is the treatment of common health problems with medicines especially designed and labeled for use without medical supervision and approved as safe and effective for such use.

Medicines for self-medication are often called 'nonprescription' or 'over the

counter' (OTC) and are available without a doctor's prescription through pharmacies. In some countries OTC products are also available in supermarkets and other outlets. Medicines that require a doctor's prescription are called prescription products (Rx products).¹

In India, the import, manufacture, distribution and sale of drugs and cosmetics are regulated by the *Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940* (DCA), the *Drugs and Cosmetics Rules, 1945* (DCR).

The phrase "OTC" has no legal recognition in India, all the drugs not included in the list of "prescription-only drugs" are considered to be non-prescription drugs (or OTC drugs). Hence "OTC Drugs" means drugs legally allowed to be sold "Over The Counter" by pharmacists, i.e. without the prescription of a Registered Medical Practitioner.

Prescription-only drugs are those medicines that are listed in *Schedules H and X* of the Drug and Cosmetics Rules. Drugs listed in *Schedule G* (mostly antihistamines) do not need prescription to purchase but require the following mandatory text on the label: "Caution: It is dangerous to take this preparation except under medical supervision".²

This study was conducted to understand the factors behind self medication.

Objectives:

1. To find the proportion of self medication among the study population.
2. To find the common ailments where self medication is practiced and the common drugs used for self medication and their sources.
3. To study the reasons for practicing self medication.

Materials and methods:

It was a cross sectional qualitative study done between June 09 to September 09 in Ahmedabad city. Two localities of lower middle class of Central zone of the city were selected for this study. Initially after framing the questionnaire pilot study was done among

40 subjects and then questionnaire was modified. All people above the age of 18 years who consented for the study were included in the research until 200 subjects were contacted and the information was collected by personal interview. Exclusion criteria: Any person (i) below 18 years and (ii) above 18 years who refused to participate in the study.

Results:

Out of the total 200 subject who participated in the study 126(63%) were males and 74(37%) were females (Table1). Among them 164(82%) were taking medicines by self (Table2). More than half of the study subject were graduate (Table 3) and there was no significant association between the practice of self medication and level of education (χ^2 0.52, $p= 0.5$)

Common illnesses for which self medication was practiced were fever (42.5%), Headache (30.30%), and cold (24.24%). Other illnesses in small proportion were body ache, diarrhea, pain and cough.

Commonly used drugs for self medication were Paracetamol (43.64%), Aspirin (16.97%), Ibuprofen (12.12%) and Cetirizine (12.73%). Others drugs used in small proportion by some were diclofenac, antacid like ranitidine, common cold remedies like Vicks 500, Antibiotics like Amoxycillin, Antidiarrhoeal like loperamide, antiemetic, and cough syrup.

Frequency of using these drugs were SOS (as and when required) by 142 people (86%), monthly by 15 people (9%) and weekly by 8 people (5%).50 people among those practicing self medication also relied on household remedies and ayurvedic and homeopathic drugs.

In 60% cases friends were the source of information for self medication and media (radio, Television, newspapers and magazine) in 35.8% and internet in 4.2% cases.

56% of people perceived improvement in health after self medication.

95% of them checked the expiry date of drugs before consuming them.

61% of people also advised their friends and relatives for self medication.

Common reasons cited for practicing self medication were saving money (60%) and saving time (52%).

It was found that 32 subjects (19.5 %) of study population were also taking prescribed drugs

for chronic illness like Heart disease, diabetes, Arthritis and Thyroid along with self medication for minor ailments.

Table 1: Age group of the study population

| Age group (years) | Males (%) | Females (%) | Total |
|-------------------|-----------------|----------------|------------|
| 20-24 | 21(60) | 14(40) | 35 |
| 25-29 | 23(77) | 7(23) | 30 |
| 30-34 | 15(55.55) | 12(44.44) | 27 |
| 35-39 | 15(68.18) | 7(31.81) | 22 |
| 40-45 | 18(60) | 12(40) | 30 |
| 45-49 | 17(60.71) | 11(39.28) | 28 |
| 50-54 | 7(63.63) | 4(36.36) | 11 |
| 55-59 | 4(50) | 4(50) | 8 |
| >=60 | 6 (66.66) | 3 (33.33) | 9 |
| Total | 126 (63) | 74 (37) | 200 |

Table 2: Age group of study population who were self medicating

| Age group (years) | Males (%) | Females (%) | Total |
|-------------------|--------------------|-------------------|------------|
| 20-24 | 17 (58.62) | 12 (41.38) | 29 |
| 25-29 | 20 (7.69) | 6 (23.07) | 26 |
| 30-34 | 11 (57.89) | 8 (42.11) | 19 |
| 35-39 | 12 (66.66) | 6 (33.33) | 18 |
| 40-45 | 16 (64) | 9 (36) | 25 |
| 45-49 | 15 (62.5) | 9 (37.5) | 24 |
| 50-54 | 5 (62.5) | 3 (37.5) | 8 |
| 55-59 | 4 (57.14) | 3 (42.86) | 7 |
| >=60 | 6 (75) | 2 (25) | 8 |
| Total | 106 (64.63) | 58 (35.37) | 164 |

Table 3: Educational qualification of the study population people as per the practice of self medication

| Education | Self medication (%) | No self medication (%) | Total (%) |
|------------------|---------------------|------------------------|------------------|
| Post graduate | 29 (85.30) | 05 (14.70) | 34 (100) |
| Graduate | 84 (79.25) | 22 (20.75) | 106 (100) |
| Higher Secondary | 19 (73.08) | 07 (26.92) | 26 (100) |
| Secondary | 32 (94.11) | 02 (5.88) | 34 (100) |
| Total | 164 (82) | 36 (18) | 200 (100) |

Discussion:

Self medication for common ailments is widely prevalent in the developing countries. In our study out of 200 subjects studied 164 (82%) were taking the medicines without prescription. A similar study by PR Shankar et al in Nepal reported 59% of respondents taking self medication for one or other ailments³. Our study observed that the common drugs used for self medication were Paracetamol (43.64%), Aspirin (16.97%), Ibuprofen (12.12%) and cetirizine (12.73%), similarly PR Shankar et al also found the commonest drug used was Paracetamol in 69 instances (43%) followed by some other analgesic in 37 instances (23%)³. Our study reported fever (42.5%), headache (30.30%) and combined they account for nearly 73%, and common cold (24.24%) as common ailments for self medication. P R Shankar reported headache and fever were the most common indications for self-medication, accounting for 60% of the illnesses requiring self-medication³. However, P D Phalke et al found that 80.49% respondents used self-medication mainly for the treatment of minor illness such as headache, cough and fever⁴.

Our study found in 60% cases friends were the source of information for self medication and media (radio, Television, newspapers and magazine) in 35.8% and internet in 4.2% cases, similarly V D Phalke et al reported Advertisement in newspaper, TV, Radio and magazines as main sources followed by chemist shops⁴. Therefore it is necessary that media should behave responsibly while advertising OTC drugs. Strict policy guidelines should be enacted by the Government in this context. A study in rural Maharashtra by V D Phalke et al found major reasons for practicing self medication were economic (58.5%) or non availability of health care facility (29.3%). Common reasons cited for practicing self medication in our study were saving time (52%) and saving money (60%)⁴. In our study non availability of health services was not the question as the study was conducted in urban set up in lower middle class people. Thus financial concern with increasing cost of health care restricts people from visiting doctors and going for practice of self medication. P D Phalke found most of the users of self-medication resorted to Allopathic system of medicine 73.17%, 9.76% was using allopathic + others and 9.02% only

Ayurvedic medicines, whereas in our study 30.5% respondents were using household remedies, Ayurvedic and Homeopathic drugs for self medication. Frequency of self medication was SOS (as and when required) by 142 people (86%), monthly by 15 people (9%) and weekly by 8 people (5%).

Thus the study concludes that self medication is found to be a common practice because of economic and time constraints. Commonly used drugs are antipyretics and analgesics. Common source of information for self medication are friends and media.

It is unsafe to do self medication for minor ailments while on medication for chronic diseases without knowing the potential interaction among medicines.

Limitations of the study: As the study was conducted on a small sample the results cannot be generalized to the population.

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Reference:

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“A world community can only exist with world communication, which means something more than extensive software facilities scattered about the globe. It means common understanding, a common tradition, common idea's and common ideals.”
Robert Maynard Hutchins
(1899-1977)