

# SOCIAL MEDIA FOR HEALTH: **WHAT SOCIALLY-ACTIVE PATIENTS REALLY WANT**

**10** Things Every  
Healthcare Marketer  
Should Know

## **THE INTERNET AND SOCIAL MEDIA HAVE BECOME UBIQUITOUS RESOURCES FOR PEOPLE SEEKING HEALTH INFORMATION** - particularly those with symptomatic,

chronic and/or serious conditions. The latest national survey from Pew Research Center on the social life of health information (2013) found that 73% of US adults with at least one chronic condition have sought health information online (76% among people with multiple chronic conditions). In that survey, topics regarding a specific disease or medical problem, a certain medical treatment, and medications were most popular, and 29% of those with chronic conditions had read or watched someone else's health experiences online.

And, much has changed since 2013. Today's digital, social, mobile, and emerging technologies enable people to learn, to connect, to share and to be heard in a much bigger way. At Health Union, we leverage the reach and influence of social media for health every day across all of our patient-centric online destinations. We wanted to know more about how and why patients use online resources for health. What motivates patients to seek health information online? What needs are being met online and via social media? How are patients engaging and where are they finding value?

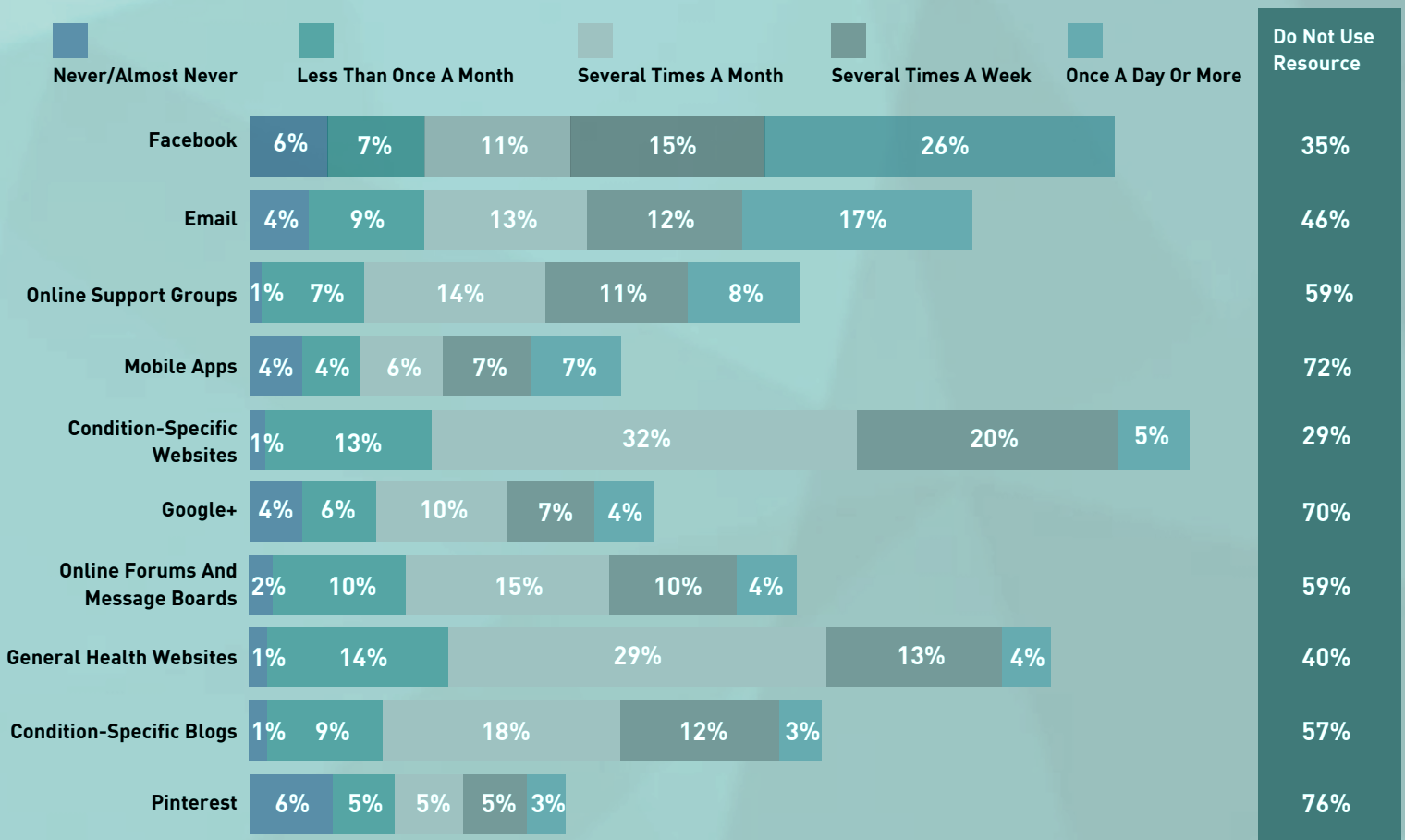
**In other words, what do patients really want from health-related online interactions?** To help answer these questions – and more – Health Union surveyed more than 2,200 people with serious health conditions (like migraine, multiple sclerosis, rheumatoid arthritis, and more) who were active users of social media for health information. The results reveal some interesting trends and important insights for healthcare marketers about patients' wants, needs, and behaviors online.



# FACEBOOK IS THE RESOURCE USED MOST FREQUENTLY TO CONSUME AND SHARE HEALTH INFORMATION

26% of all patients surveyed used Facebook once a day or more for health information; more than half (52%) used it at least monthly. While condition-specific websites were the most popular online resource for health, patients visited less frequently – 57% of respondents used condition-specific websites sites monthly and 5% used daily. Only 14% of those surveyed used a pharmaceutical manufacturer’s website at least monthly for health information.

## USE OF ONLINE RESOURCES FOR HEALTH INFORMATION



n=2,253

Q) Which of the following online resources have you used within the past 6 months for any reason? These are resources that either you posted to and/or read information on. (Select all that apply) [Top 10 resources shown above]

Q) Of the online resources that you have used in the past 6 months, how frequently have you used the following for health information? This includes reading, commenting, and/or sharing health information. (Select all that apply) [Top 10 resources shown above]

# PATIENTS TURN TO ONLINE RESOURCES AND SOCIAL MEDIA THROUGHOUT THEIR JOURNEY

98% of patients surveyed used social media or online resources for health information during their personal journeys with a serious health condition. Most commonly, patients go online when experiencing new or different symptoms, for information related to medication or treatment, and when seeking emotional support/others who understand their experience.

## WHEN PATIENTS GO ONLINE



67%

EXPERIENCING NEW  
OR DIFFERENT SYMPTOMS



67%

STARTING ON A NEW  
MEDICATION



61%

MAKING A MEDICATION  
DECISION OR CHANGE



59%

WHEN EXPERIENCING SIDE  
EFFECTS TO A MEDICATION



57%

WHEN NEEDING EMOTIONAL SUPPORT  
OR OTHERS WHO UNDERSTAND WHAT I  
AM GOING THROUGH

# 4 PATIENTS READ, WATCH, FOLLOW, LIKE, AND COMMENT ON HEALTH CONTENT

98% of respondents have read health-related information or watched a health video online within the past 6 months. **What health topics are patients viewing online?**

## TOP 10 TOPICS PATIENTS READ OR WATCHED ONLINE

Managing Or Coping With Symptoms	60%
Symptoms For A Health Condition	59%
Medication Or Treatment	59%
Medication Side Effects Or Reactions	57%
Daily Living Or Lifestyle Tips	54%
Effectiveness Of A Medication Or Treatment	54%
Exercise Or Activity Tips	50%
Complementary And Alternative Therapies	46%
Clinical Trials/Research	42%
Diagnostic Test/Medical Testing	41%

n=1,998

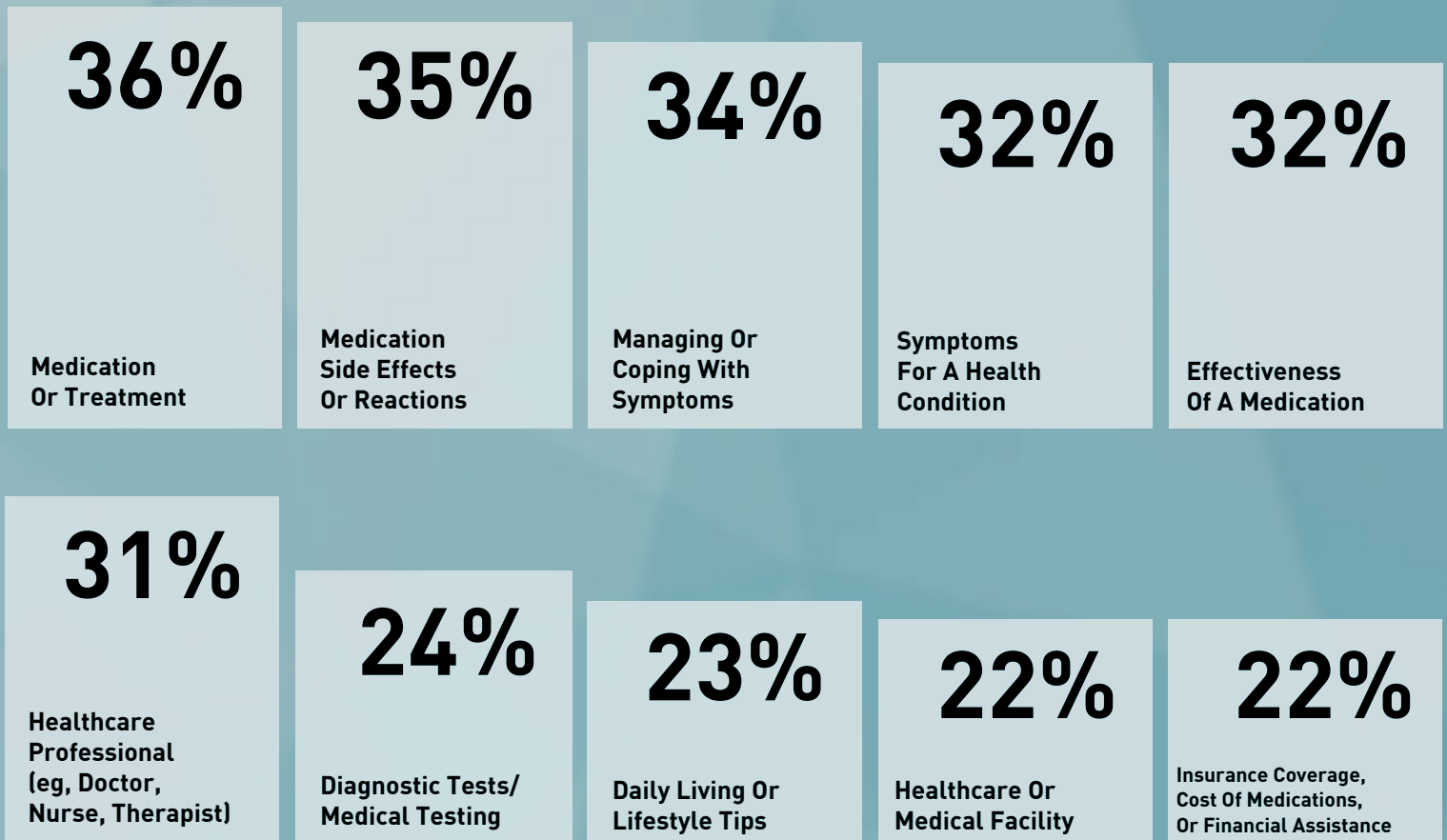
Q) For the following health-related topics, what activities have you performed on a social media or website? (Select all that apply)

More than just consuming content, patients engage online and in social media for health information. 74% have followed social media discussion or forum threads; 70% have liked a post, photo or video; 61% have commented on health-related posts, photos or videos within the past 6 months. Furthermore, 48% of patients indicated they have shared health-related content online or via social media (that is not their own). **The online experience for health is an exchange of information.**

# 5 PATIENTS ARE SEEKING INPUT FROM FELLOW PATIENTS

Half of patients surveyed have asked a health-related question to others online within the previous 6 months – and 87% of those were seeking responses from other patients with the health condition. (Only 46% indicated they were seeking an answer from a doctor or healthcare professional.) Medication experiences, symptoms, and coping with symptoms were leading topics that generated questions from patients online.

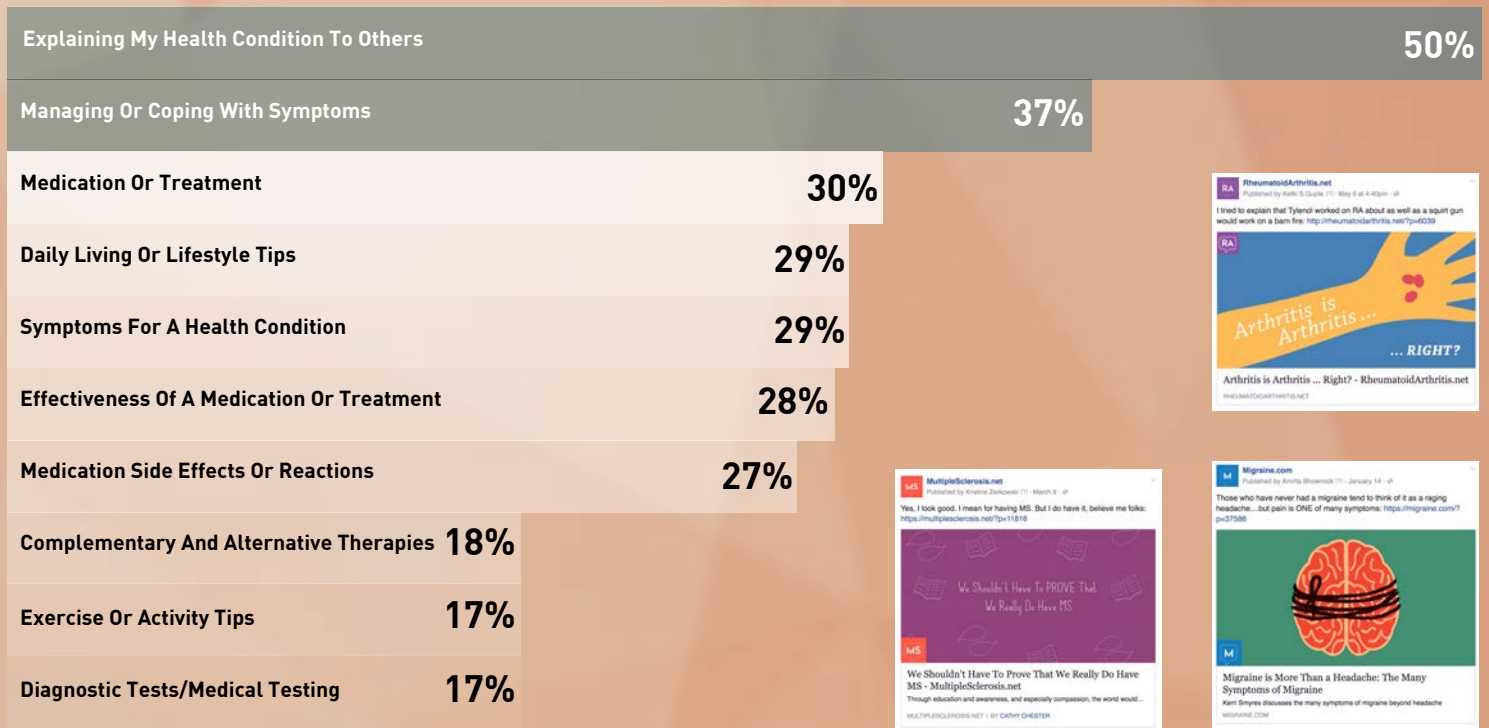
## TOP 10 TYPES OF QUESTIONS PATIENTS ASKED ONLINE



*n=1,077*

*For the following health-related topics, what activities have you performed on social media or website? (Select all that apply)*

# TOP 10 TOPICS FOR POSTS PATIENTS SHARED ONLINE



n=1,082

What type of health-related content have you posted or shared online or on a social media site? (Select all that apply)

## PERSONAL EXPERIENCES ARE MOST COMMONLY POSTED OR SHARED – TO HELP OTHERS UNDERSTAND THEIR CONDITION

In the previous 6 months, 49% of individuals have posted or shared a personal story or content online, and 48% have shared a health-related post, photo, or video that was not their own. Typically text or written content is posted (95%), which consists of personal experience and viewpoints (85%), factual information (57%), and links to helpful resources (46%).

The desire to explain their condition drives most of those who posted or shared content online, along with managing or coping with symptoms. This mirrors the behaviors observed on Health Union platforms, like MultipleSclerosis.net, RheumatoidArthritis.net and Migraine.com, where content that promotes understanding and support for these conditions receives the highest levels of engagement in social media.



# PATIENTS ARE WILLING TO SHARE THEIR OWN EXPERIENCE TO HELP OTHERS

57% of patients surveyed have answered or responded to others' health-related questions online. Of those, patients provided responses about explaining their health condition or managing symptoms.

## COMMON QUESTIONS PATIENTS ANSWER ONLINE

32%

EXPLAINING MY HEALTH CONDITION TO OTHERS

31%

MANAGING OR COPING WITH SYMPTOMS

29%

MEDICATION OR TREATMENT

28%

EFFECTIVENESS OF A MEDICATION OR TREATMENT

28%

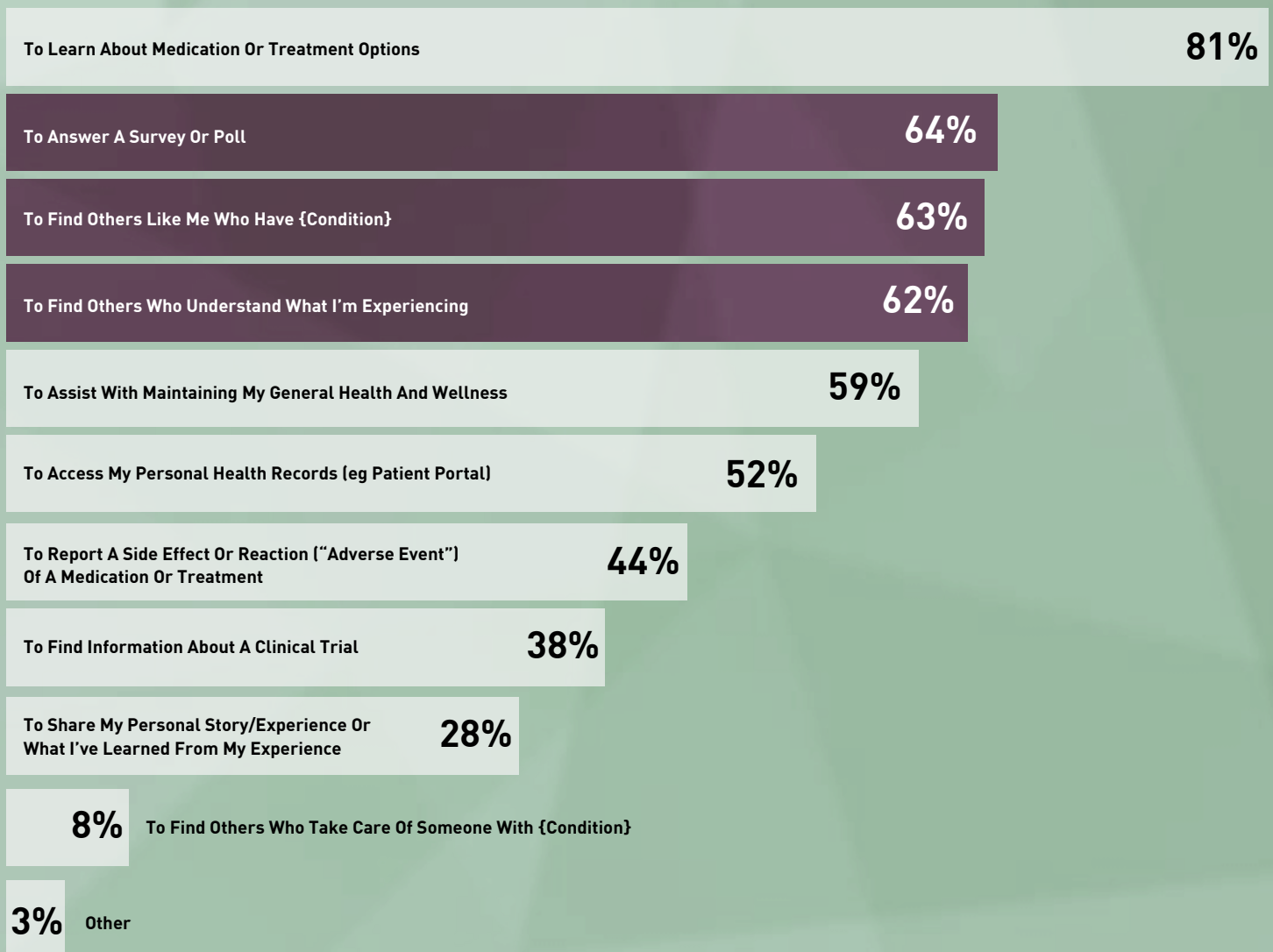
MEDICATION SIDE EFFECTS OR REACTIONS



# PATIENTS SEEK ONLINE RESOURCES TO LEARN ABOUT TREATMENT OPTIONS AND MEDICATIONS, TO FIND OTHERS LIKE THEMSELVES

The most common reason for visiting online resources was to learn about medication or treatment options (81%); however, patients also want to be heard (via surveys or polls) and to connect with others who have the same condition and understand their experiences.

## REASONS FOR VISITING ONLINE RESOURCES FOR HEALTH-RELATED PURPOSES



n=2,253

Q) There are other reasons for visiting social media and websites for health-related purposes, please select those that apply to you.

## PATIENTS ARE ONLINE FOR HEALTH AT HOME, DURING THE EVENINGS – USING MULTIPLE DEVICES

Those surveyed indicated they went online for health information in the evenings (58%) and mornings (46%); only 1 in 4 indicated when preparing for a healthcare professional visit. Home was the most common location from which individuals accessed online health information (96%), whereas only 10% indicated accessing online resources from their doctor's office and only 2% from a pharmacy.

*Not surprisingly, computers (71%) and smartphones (63%) were the most commonly used devices for accessing health information – with more than **70% of respondents selecting 2 or more devices.***

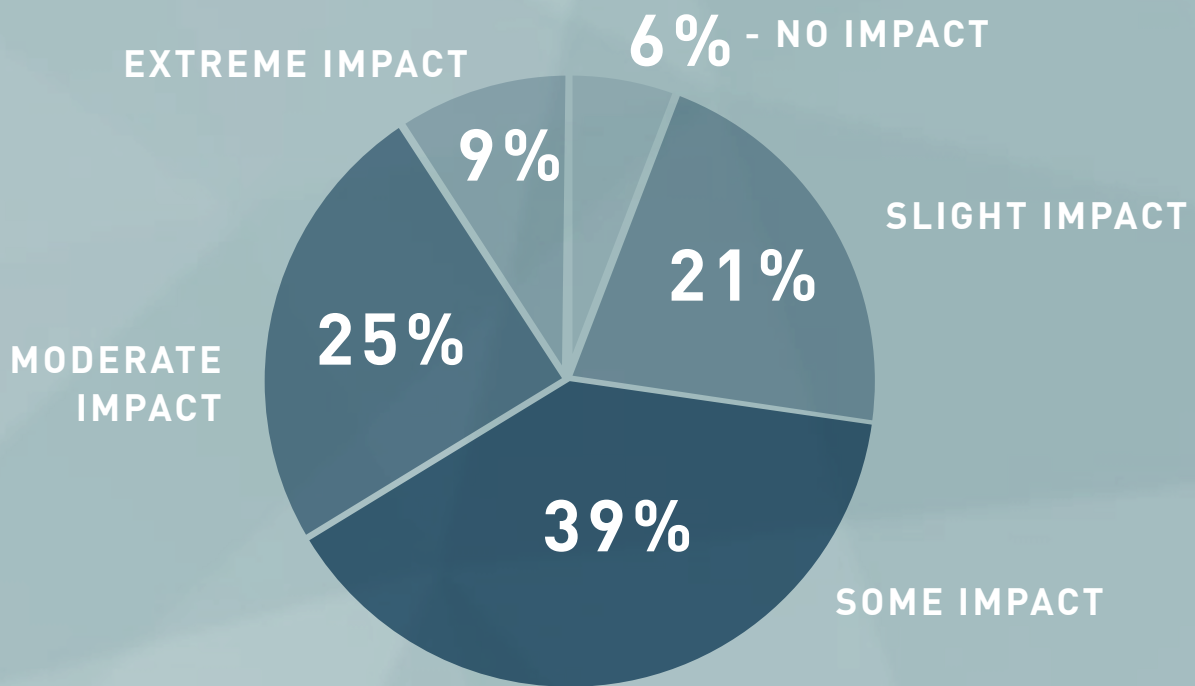


Search engines were cited as the most common starting place when going online for health information (73%); however, half of patients surveyed indicated they start with a website they have bookmarked or visit regularly.

# 10 ONLINE HEALTH INFORMATION MAKES AN IMPACT

97% of patients in the survey indicated they use the information gathered online when visiting with their healthcare professional – with 29% reporting they use this information often with their HCP. Online information was cited as having at least some impact on their health-related decisions by 73% of those surveyed.

## IMPACT OF ONLINE RESOURCES ON PATIENTS' HEALTH-RELATED DECISIONS



n=2,253

Q) Rate how much impact social media and websites have had on your health-related decisions.

## THE KEY TAKEAWAY

People with serious health conditions are attracted to condition-specific online resources and social media because the content and like-minded community speaks to them; patients engage over and over again because they find validation, empathy, support, and connection. Understanding these motivations and the resulting behaviors provide a roadmap for creating online resources that better meet patient needs and encourage engagement.

## ABOUT THE SURVEY

In April 2016, Health Union conducted a survey of patients with serious chronic conditions and their caregivers, who had used an online resource (eg, social media, website) for health information in the past 6 months. Respondents were asked about their usage and experience with various online forms of health information, as well as questions about specific social media engagement behaviors.

2,253 respondents were recruited using social media posts, website content and newsletter ads from Health Union's patient-centric online destinations, including Migraine.com, MultipleSclerosis.net, RheumatoidArthritis.net, COPD.net, Type2Diabetes.com, HepatitisC.net, and CrohnsDisease.com. Respondents to this survey may be characterized as patients who are "active" online and in social media.

## RESPONDENT PROFILE

- 98% were patients and 2% were caregivers, whose lives were impacted by migraine (33%), multiple sclerosis (28%), rheumatoid arthritis (20%), COPD (8%), and other chronic health conditions (12%)
- Average age of those surveyed was 53; with 88% of respondents female, 11% male, and 1% preferred not to answer
- 70% of respondents were diagnosed with their condition more than 5 years ago, with 87% currently taking a prescription medication for their health condition; less than 10% were not currently treating with any medications

**For more information about this survey – or to schedule a presentation of the complete findings – contact [Insights@health-union.com](mailto:Insights@health-union.com).**

## ABOUT HEALTH UNION, LLC

At Health Union, patient relationships are our business. Our growing family of condition-specific, online destinations attract millions of people each month who want to learn, to share, and to connect with others. These active, patient-inspired platforms deliver fresh, original, daily content accompanied by distinct, shareable graphics and amplified via social media to cultivate thriving relationships with real people suffering serious health conditions. Health Union's unique platforms are dynamic ecosystems dedicated to illuminating the voices and experiences of people with migraine, multiple sclerosis, rheumatoid arthritis, hepatitis C, and more. Our intense focus on patients fosters open and honest interactions about health experiences that help all stakeholders make more informed decisions about healthcare.

*Asthma.net | CrohnsDisease.com | COPD.net | HepatitisC.net*  
*IrritableBowelSyndrome.net | Migraine.com | MultipleSclerosis.net*  
*RheumatoidArthritis.net | Type2Diabetes.com*

## REFERENCES

Fox S, Duggan M. *The Diagnosis Difference*. November 26, 2013. Available from:[http://www.pewinternet.org/files/oldmedia/Files/Reports/2013/PewResearch\\_DiagnosisDifference.pdf](http://www.pewinternet.org/files/oldmedia/Files/Reports/2013/PewResearch_DiagnosisDifference.pdf)

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