



Stay home, stay healthy: Has Covid changed our health habits for good?

- Community pharmacies still most popular place to buy medication for 43 % of Europeans
- 22 % of Europeans plan to continue wearing a face mask post Covid
- 45 % of Europeans paid more attention to healthy eating during the pandemic
- Brand name more important to Europeans than environmental factors when purchasing medicine and food supplements

With most of social life on hold for months on end, Covid has given us ample opportunity to take a step back and evaluate our current routines with regard to their health benefits. It seems that some of the habits that were created during the pandemic – whether self-induced or imposed by the government – are either unlikely to be abandoned completely post Covid or will have at least helped some Europeans make it through these difficult months. What did Europeans change during the pandemic, and which of those changes are likely to persist?

Hands, face, space

Among all restrictions that came with Covid, the ones regulating behaviour in the public space seem to be more than temporarily tolerable for a considerable number of Europeans. Post Covid, 45 % vow to carry on washing their hands more regularly to avoid spreading germs, 1 in 3

Europeans want to continue to keep the advised minimum distance and 22 % even plan

on wearing a face mask in public. Perhaps unsurprisingly, amid the countries that harbour the majority of supporters of these mea-

asures are those that recorded a particularly high mortality rate. Frequent hand washing will continue to be a part of everyday life for the majority of Italians and Ukrainians (53 %) as well as the Portuguese (52 %). Face coverings could remain especially popular in the UK (38 %).

Needless to say, keeping a clean home is just as relevant as basic hygiene in times of a pandemic. Almost 1 in 3 Europeans (31 %) claim they will use cleaning agents with disinfecting properties more regularly in the future. The Dutch are least tickled by this idea – only 1 in 5 would consider disinfecting their homes going forward. This reluctance is easily explained with a glance at their self-assessment regarding hygiene standards prior to the pandemic: Aside from Serbia (42 %), no other nation is as confident in their level of cleanliness as the Dutch (40 %).

COVID made Europeans ... somewhat healthier?

Speaking of habits: Many Europeans used the time that opened up during Covid to make some health-related changes in their lives – probably not least because they figured a healthier lifestyle could only do them good in avoiding falling ill with the virus. A total of 70 % of Europeans also showed an amplified willingness to invest more money and time in their health.

During the pandemic, 45 % of Europeans paid more attention to their diet and ate more healthily. This goes hand in hand with an increased readiness to pay more for fresh and high-quality foods (42 %). People in Serbia (54 %) and



22 %

want to continue to wear face masks in the future, e.g. on public transport.

Pharmacy remains preferred place to shop for OTC-medication



43%

would continue to buy their medication from the pharmacy if given the choice.



21%
Drug stores



12%
Online pharmacies



5%
Online shops

the Czech Republic (50 %) were particularly selective as to what foods they use to fuel their bodies. Belgians, on the other hand, are yet to discover their passion for nutrition, as only 37 % of them felt inclined to spend more time in the kitchen during the pandemic. Perhaps the Spanish could share some cooking advice: 57 % of them recently devoted more energy to eating healthy, after all.

Nutritional supplements are a popular way of providing additional vitamins and minerals for the body: 73 % of Europeans purchase them regularly. In addition to spending more money on healthy produce, people in Eastern European countries also come in at first place with regard to nutritional supplements. Almost half of the Serbian population (49 %), 47 % of Czechs and 42 % of Poles increased their intake of food supplements – compared to only 29 % on average across Europe.

Physical exercise played an important role for 35 % of Europeans. Fitness apps or online courses, however, were not particularly popular (16 %). People in Germany were among those who found it a bit harder to motivate themselves to get off the couch and get moving recently (29 %). Overall, Europeans are unlikely to blindly jump on any fitness trend coming their way: Only 38 % have been gotten sucked into a temporary health craze or think these should become more of a lifestyle, while 42 % are generally wary of such developments. Still, 20 % have made it their mission to pay more attention to their fitness and nutrition in the future – with or without a trend to go along with it.

Pharmacy remains preferred place to shop for OTC-medication – and getting advice

With an increased interest in and an aspiration to healthy living, how did people in Europe procure information on these topics? The short answer is: The internet. 54 % of Europeans have increased their online searches for health-related information compared to previous years. Interestingly though, this does not automatically mean they bypass their pharmacist when acquiring medication – or information about it.

Despite Covid, only 14 % of Europeans have ordered more OTC-medicines via online pharmacies – 43 % flat out refuse to order them online altogether. Regardless of an increasing number of online platforms and other channels for obtaining medication, community pharmacies are still Europe's first choice for over-the-counter medicines. When asked where they would prefer to purchase over-the-counter medication if they had free choice, a substantial share of respondents (43 %) mention community pharmacies as their first pick, 13 % of them being particularly partial to their local branch. People in Poland (46 %) and Russia (44 %) are extraordinarily supportive of bricks-and-mortar pharmacies



14%

of Europeans have ordered more medicines via online pharmacies.

generally while people in Serbia remain forever faithful to their local pharmacist (42 %). The remaining outlets include drugstores (21 %), supermarkets (15 %), online pharmacies (12 %), mail-order companies such as Amazon and the like (5 %) as well as parapharmacies, particularly in Portugal (36 %) and Spain (26 %). In the UK, which has a comprehensive general-sale offering, more than 1 in 2 people (55 %) purchase their OTC medication at a supermarket, while drugstores are exceedingly popular in the Netherlands (58 %). In Switzerland, every third person picks up their medication there. Despite their support for bricks-and-mortar pharmacies, Russians are also most likely to purchase medication online (25 %).

One decisive advantage community pharmacies have over all other channels might well be in-person consultation, the importance of which has remained stable over the last year. Compared to last year's survey, figures for internet searches dropped slightly (from 39 to 36 %) despite the self-observed increase in search requests, while the number of people who said they turn to their pharmacist for information on medication intake remained steady at 40 %. The relevance of input from doctors has decreased from 51 to 39 % – probably not least because many people avoided seeing their GP altogether unless it was truly necessary to avoid risking an infection with Covid. People have also become less likely to consult instructions in packs: Compared to 61 % in 2020, now only 53 % say they first look to the package leaflet for information on their medicine.

Medication: Brand name more important than sustainability

Whether they buy them online, from their local pharmacist or any other place: What is most important to Europeans when it comes to purchasing medicines and food supplements? For 38 %, it is the brand name and what they associate with it – trust plays a crucial role here. In Ukraine (47 %) and Portugal (46 %), people pay special attention to this detail. Environmentally friendly and sustainable packaging comes in second as a decisive factor for 1 in 4 Europeans, while 1 in 5 prefer medication that is produced in Europe. Austrians (35 %) are particularly aware of where their meds come from. Suitability for people with food intolerances plays a minor role (16 %), along with labelling for specific dietary or religious requirements like “vegan” and “vegetarian” (9 %) as well as “Halal” (4 %). Overall, 31 % trust that “doctor knows best” and take the medication that their physician prescribes. In Belgium and France, people are least likely to second-guess their doctor's orders (39 and 38 %). A recommendation from their pharmacist is a good enough quality feature for 17 % of Europeans.

