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1989-90 NATIONAL HEALTH SURVEY USE OF MEDICATIONS, AUSTRALIA

This publication contains statistics about the use of medications by the Australian population. These statistics have been compiled from information collected in the 1989-90 National Health Survey (NHS) conducted by the ABS, and represent a selection of those available from the survey. Use of medications includes the consumption or use for health or medical reasons of any medication, pills or ointments (including vitamin and mineral supplements but excluding sunscreens and cosmetics) during the two weeks prior to interview.

In the survey, people were asked whether in the previous two weeks they had used any cough medicines or remedies for colds, medications for allergy, skin ointments or creams, medications for stomach or laxatives, fluid tablets or medications for heart problems or blood pressure, vitamin or mineral supplements, pain relievers, sleeping medications, tranquillisers or sedatives or other medications. For each type of medication used, information was collected about the reason(s) for use and whether or not the medication had been prescribed or advised by a doctor. Further information about the type of medication and frequency and duration of use was recorded for pain relievers, sleeping medications and tranquillisers and sedatives.

MAIN FEATURES

- Some 70 per cent of the population, 91 per cent of persons who experienced illness or injury in the two weeks prior to interview, used medication in that two week period.
- The most commonly used medications were pain relievers (35% of the population), vitamin and mineral supplements (23%) and skin ointments (18%).
- A higher proportion of females than males took pain relievers (42% and 29% respectively). Only 26 per cent of persons taking pain relievers reported that the medication was prescribed.
- Almost three quarters (73%) of persons taking vitamins and minerals did so for preventive or other "health enhancing" reasons, rather than for an illness or injury they already had. Use was higher among females (28%) than males (19%).
- Use of skin ointments was highest among the very young (25% of those under 5 years of age) and older age groups (26% of those aged 75 years and over). Most people using skin ointments did so for skin conditions such as eczema, dermatitis and acne (60%), musculoskeletal conditions (13%) and injuries (13%).
- Some 5 per cent of the population took sleeping medications and 2.2 per cent took tranquillisers in the two weeks prior to interview.

INQUIRIES

For further information about National Health Survey output contact Brian Richings on Canberra (06) 252 5786 or any ABS State office.

For information about other ABS statistics and services please contact Information Services on Canberra (06) 252 6627, 252 5402, 252 6007 or any ABS State office.

General use of medications

From information collected in the 1989-90 NHS, an estimated 11,952,700 persons or 70.4 per cent of the Australian population used medication in the two weeks prior to interview.

Use of medications, either separately or in conjunction with other actions, is the most common action people take for their health. As shown in Table 1 below, of those people who reported a recent illness, 90.7 per cent used medication.

TABLE 1. TYPE OF CONDITION EXPERIENCED IN THE TWO WEEKS PRIOR TO INTERVIEW
BY TYPE OF ACTIONS TAKEN, AUSTRALIA, 1989-90

Type of condition experienced in the two weeks prior to interview	Number of persons experiencing the condition ('000)	Selected actions(a) (Per cent)				
		Used medication	Consulted doctor	Other Health Professional	Visit to casualty/ outpatients	Days off work/school
Diseases of the nervous system and sense organs	1,067.5	62.1	24.8	25.6	2.8	5.5
Diseases of the circulatory system	2,006.1	96.3	18.0	1.5	1.2	0.7
Diseases of the respiratory system	3,974.1	90.8	18.6	5.5	0.9	11.8
Diseases of the digestive system	2,206.1	64.6	9.0	32.9	1.0	5.7
Diseases of the skin and subcutaneous tissue	2,158.3	92.2	9.5	5.5	0.8	0.8
Diseases of the musculoskeletal system	2,236.8	73.8	17.5	17.4	1.9	3.9
Injuries	1,208.3	51.1	19.9	11.2	8.2	9.8
Total all recent conditions(b)	12,026.1	90.7	23.9	16.6	3.0	9.6

(a) Persons may have taken more than one type of action for each condition. (b) Not all conditions are shown, so figures will not add to totals.

Results of the survey indicate there has been an increase in the use of medication from 66.7 per cent of the population (approximately 10 million people) recorded at the 1983 Australian Health Survey to 70.4 per cent in 1989-90. As shown in Table 2 below, the greatest increase was in the use of skin ointments.

TABLE 2. PERSONS USING MEDICATIONS BY TYPE OF MEDICATION
AUSTRALIA, 1983 AND 1989-90

Type of medication	1983		1989-90	
	Number ('000)	Per cent	Number ('000)	Per cent
Vitamin and mineral supplements	3,825.4	25.2	3,960.0	23.3
Medication for cough or cold	1,365.0	9.0	2,030.9	12.0
Medication for allergy	602.2	4.0	1,010.8	5.9
Skin ointments	1,757.1	11.6	3,088.7	18.2
Stomach medicines or laxatives	1,021.8	6.7	1,317.0	7.8
Medications for fluid, heart or blood pressure	1,514.1	10.0	1,842.4	10.8
Pain relievers	4,967.6	32.8	6,021.2	35.4
Sleeping medications	546.1	3.6	844.8	5.0
Tranquillisers or sedatives	567.8	3.7	376.4	2.2
Other medications	2,332.0	15.4	3,242.2	19.1
Total persons using medications	10,110.2	66.7	11,952.7	70.4
Total persons	15,166.9	100.0	16,988.8	100.0

Table 3 below shows the use of medication by State or Territory of interview.

TABLE 3. PERSONS: TYPE OF MEDICATION USED(a), STATES AND TERRITORIES, 1989-90
(Per cent of population)

Type of medication	NSW	Vic.	Qld	SA	WA	Tas.	NT	ACT	Total
Vitamin and mineral supplements	24.5	21.3	26.6	19.1	22.4	22.0	25.2	24.3	23.3
Medication for cough or cold	12.2	12.3	10.8	11.2	12.9	10.1	13.7	14.2	12.0
Medication for allergy	5.7	5.6	6.4	7.1	6.3	5.5	5.5	5.5	5.9
Skin ointments	18.3	17.3	19.8	16.4	18.9	15.6	22.3	21.2	18.2
Stomach medicines or laxatives	7.9	7.6	8.1	8.3	7.6	6.6	4.9	6.7	7.8
Medications for fluid, heart or blood pressure	11.5	11.4	10.8	11.0	8.3	11.8	4.3	5.9	10.8
Pain relievers	34.9	34.0	39.3	35.8	34.9	31.6	34.3	36.2	35.4
Sleeping medications	5.0	4.9	5.3	5.9	4.0	5.6	2.6	2.8	5.0
Tranquillisers or sedatives	2.3	2.3	2.4	2.3	1.5	2.2	1.1	1.2	2.2
Other medications	19.1	18.6	20.4	21.1	17.7	16.2	13.7	17.9	19.1
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

(a) Each person may have reported more than one type of medication, and therefore components do not add to totals.

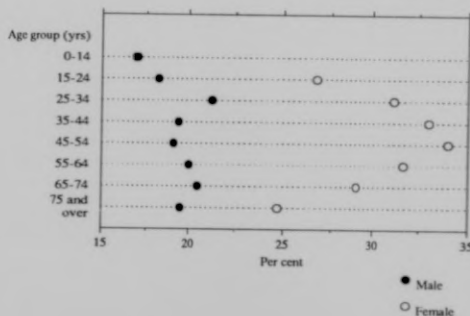
In the remainder of this publication, a selection of these medication types is discussed in detail. Details of those medications grouped as "Other Medications" are not available, but an examination of a sample of questionnaires showed that the most frequently reported medications in this group were antibiotics, contraceptive pills, medications for asthma and hayfever, medications for diabetes and thyroid disease, analgesics and anti-inflammatory medications, medications for epilepsy, potassium supplements, diuretics and other medications for cardiovascular disorders.

Vitamin and mineral supplements

About a quarter (23.3%) of the population of Australia reported taking vitamin and mineral supplements in the two weeks prior to interview.

Overall, more females than males reported taking vitamin and mineral supplements (27.5% and 19.1% respectively). This pattern was recorded for all age groups except under 15 years for which the proportion of males and females using vitamins and mineral supplements was about the same. Of males who use vitamin and mineral supplements, the 25 to 34 year age group reported the highest use (21.3%); for females, the 45 to 54 year age group had the highest use (34.0%).

CHART 1. PERSONS TAKING VITAMIN AND MINERAL SUPPLEMENTS: SEX BY AGE, AUSTRALIA, 1989-90



Among the States and Territories, Queensland reported the highest use of vitamin and mineral supplements (26.6% of the population) and South Australia reported the lowest (19.1%) - see Table 3. The proportion of people in the capital cities who reported taking supplements was similar to that for people in the rest of the State.

Most people who took vitamins and minerals did so for preventive and other "health enhancing" reasons (72.7%) rather than for medical conditions which they already had. Consistent with this, 63.2 per cent of those taking vitamins and minerals reported they were in good or excellent health. Of people who took vitamins and minerals for a medical condition, diseases of the respiratory system were the most commonly reported conditions (26.1%). Of those using vitamins and minerals for respiratory conditions, 51.3 per cent took them for the common cold and 16.0 per cent for influenza. Whether taken for "healthy" reasons or for a medical condition, a higher proportion of people taking vitamins and minerals took them in winter (25.2%) than other seasons.

TABLE 4. PERSONS WHO TOOK VITAMIN AND MINERAL SUPPLEMENTS IN THE TWO WEEKS PRIOR TO INTERVIEW: SELECTED REASONS FOR USE BY AGE, AUSTRALIA, 1989-90 (Per cent)

Reasons for use	Age group (years)				Total
	Under 25	25-44	45-64	65 and over	
Preventive measures and other reasons of health	78.4	72.8	69.0	63.5	72.7
Diseases of the respiratory system	10.1	6.5	5.8	3.5	7.1
Diseases of the musculoskeletal system and connective tissue	0.3	1.4	5.0	9.3	2.8
Endocrine, nutritional and metabolic diseases and immunity disorders	1.0	1.8	3.5	5.0	2.3
Diseases of the genitourinary system	1.1	2.9	3.2	0.8	2.2
Diseases of blood and blood-forming organs	1.4	2.1	2.2	2.9	2.0
Total all reasons for use(a)	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

(a) Only selected reasons for use are shown so figures will not add to totals.

Of those who took vitamins and minerals, 78.4 per cent reported that none of them were prescribed (or advised) by a doctor, 18.2 per cent reported they were all prescribed and 3.5 per cent had only some of them prescribed. Of people with diseases of the blood and blood-forming organs and who took vitamins and minerals 73.8% reported that all their vitamins and minerals were prescribed. Proportions of people using prescribed medications for neoplasms and endocrine, nutritional and metabolic diseases and immunity disorders were also high at 61.4 per cent and 58.7 per cent respectively.

Most people taking vitamins and minerals reported taking them 6-7 days a week, regardless of type (71.7% overall). The second highest frequency of use was 1 to 3 days a week for those taking multivitamins only or more than one kind of vitamin, and less than once a week for those taking only one kind of vitamin.

Although there was little difference in the proportions of Australian born people and overseas born people taking vitamins and minerals (23.6% and 22.3% respectively), country of birth appeared to play some part in whether people took vitamin and mineral supplements, with the highest proportion among those born in Northern America (38.7%). The lowest usage was recorded among those born in the Middle East and North Africa (16.0%).

Of the people aged 15 to 64 years, a higher proportion of those not in the labour force reported use of vitamins and minerals (26.0%) than either employed or unemployed people. Usage was highest among employed females (32.9%) and lowest among unemployed males (15.9%). Age and sex differences in labour force characteristics and in the use of vitamin and mineral supplements should be borne in mind in interpreting these findings.

Among employed people, usage of vitamins and mineral supplements differed by occupation groups. The highest proportion of people using vitamins and minerals was recorded for professionals (31.2%), followed by clerks and salespersons and personal service workers (both 29.8%). The lowest proportion of people reporting use of vitamins and minerals was reported by tradespersons and plant and machine operators and drivers (18.4% and 18.5% respectively).

Table 5 below shows the use of vitamin and mineral supplements by lifestyle and other factors.

TABLE 5. PERSONS AGED 18 YEARS AND OVER: WHETHER TOOK VITAMIN AND MINERAL SUPPLEMENTS IN THE TWO WEEKS PRIOR TO INTERVIEW BY AGE BY SELECTED LIFESTYLE FACTORS, AUSTRALIA, 1989-90
(Per cent)

Lifestyle factors(a)	18 to 44 years		45 years or more	
	Took vitamins and minerals	Did not take vitamins and minerals	Took vitamins and minerals	Did not take vitamins and minerals
<i>Smoker Status -</i>				
Smoker	23.8	76.2	21.8	78.2
Ex-smoker	28.4	71.6	25.7	74.3
Non-smoker	25.8	74.2	26.9	73.1
<i>Alcohol Risk Level -</i>				
Did not drink	25.2	74.8	24.9	75.1
Low	26.1	73.9	26.2	73.8
Moderate	26.3	73.7	26.2	73.8
High	21.7	78.3	20.5	79.5
<i>Exercise Level -</i>				
Did not exercise	21.2	78.8	20.4	79.6
Low	27.2	72.8	29.5	70.5
Medium	27.7	72.3	28.4	71.6
High	28.5	71.5	28.4	71.6
<i>Body Mass Index -</i>				
Underweight	32.0	68.0	31.5	68.5
Acceptable weight	26.7	73.3	28.4	71.6
Overweight	21.2	78.8	22.6	77.4
Obese	20.8	79.2	20.6	79.4
Total persons	25.6	74.4	25.4	74.6

(a) Alcohol risk level, exercise level and body mass index are derived from information provided by respondents in the survey. Definitions and details of the methods used are contained in the publication 1989-90 *National Health Survey: Users' Guide* (Cat. No. 4363.0).

Medication For Allergy

Less than 6 per cent (5.9%) of the population of Australia reported taking medication for an allergy in the two weeks prior to interview.

Overall, more females than males reported taking medication for an allergy (6.5% and 5.4% respectively). A higher proportion of those aged 45 to 54 years had used allergy medication (6.8%) than in other age groups. The use of allergy medication was lowest for the age group 75 years and over (3.2%).

Among the States and Territories, South Australians reported the highest usage (7.1%), followed by Queensland (6.4%). Those in the Australian Capital Territory, Northern Territory and Tasmania reported the lowest usage (all 5.5% - see Table 3). Overall, there was little difference between those living in the capital cities compared to the rest of the State in the proportion who took medication for an allergy (6.0% and 5.8% respectively). However, this pattern varied between States and Territories. In Queensland, those living in Brisbane had greater usage than those living in the rest of the State (7.5% and 5.5% respectively), while in Western Australia, those in the rest of the State reported greater usage (7.1%) than those in Perth (6.0%).

Most (82.6%) people who took allergy medication, did so for diseases of the respiratory system, mainly hayfever (65.0% of whom reported that their medication was fully prescribed), and asthma (95.5% of medications were fully prescribed). Some 11.1 per cent used allergy medications for skin problems, principally eczema, dermatitis and skin rash.

Use of allergy medication varied by seasons with highest use in spring (7.0%) compared with 5.9 per cent in summer, 5.6 per cent in autumn and 5.5 per cent in winter.

A higher proportion of Australian born people (6.4%) reported taking medication for an allergy than those who were born overseas (4.5%). Of those born in Northern America, 8.2 per cent reported taking medication for an allergy. This was the only group which had a higher usage of medication for an allergy than Australian born people. The lowest usage of medication for an allergy (3.0%) was reported by people born in the Middle East and North Africa.

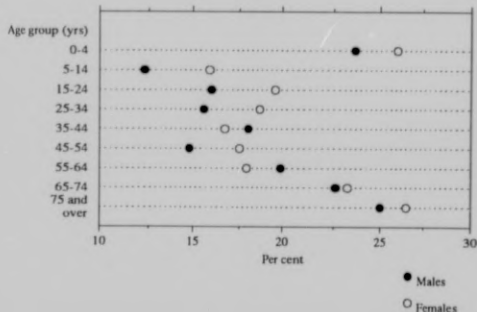
Use of allergy medication amongst the employed differed by occupation groups. Professionals reported the highest usage (8.4%), followed by clerks (6.9%). This may relate to the higher prevalence of asthma and other respiratory conditions among these occupations. Use among labourers and related workers was the lowest (4.5%).

Skin Ointments

In the two weeks prior to interview, 18.2 per cent of the population of Australia used skin ointments (excluding sunscreens and cosmetics).

More females than males used skin ointments (19.2% and 17.1% respectively). Those aged 75 years or more had the highest use (26.0%) followed by those aged under 5 years (24.8%). Those aged 5 to 14 years had the lowest usage (15.9%).

CHART 2. PERSONS USING SKIN OINTMENTS IN THE TWO WEEKS PRIOR TO INTERVIEW: SEX BY AGE, AUSTRALIA, 1989-90



A higher proportion of people in the Northern Territory and the Australian Capital Territory used skin ointments (22.3% and 21.2% respectively) than in other States. Tasmania and South Australia reported the lowest usage (15.6% and 16.4% respectively) - see Table 3. Overall, a higher proportion of those living in capital cities used skin ointments (18.9%) than those living in the rest of the State (16.9%).

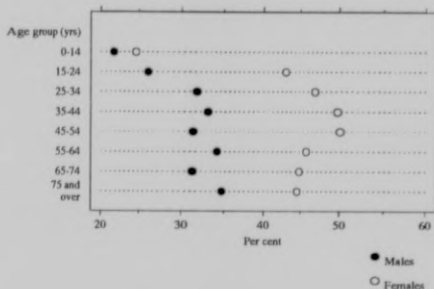
The most commonly reported reasons for using skin ointments were eczema and dermatitis and other diseases of the skin and subcutaneous tissue (60.0%), diseases of the musculoskeletal system and connective tissue (13.4%) and injuries (12.9%). The majority of people using skin ointments for diseases of the skin and subcutaneous tissue reported the ointments were all prescribed, except in the case of acne, for which 59.9% reported that their skin ointments were not prescribed. Most of those people using skin ointments for diseases of the musculoskeletal system and connective tissue, or injuries reported that the ointments were not prescribed (73.5% and 81.8% respectively).

Pain Relievers

Over a third (35.4%) of the population of Australia reported taking pain relievers in the two weeks prior to interview.

More females than males reported taking pain relievers (41.9% and 28.9% respectively) and this pattern was recorded across all age groups. Among males, the highest proportion using pain relievers was recorded for the age groups 75 years and over (34.7%) and 55 to 64 years (34.1%); for females, the highest proportion using pain relievers was in the age groups 45 to 54 years (50.1%) and 35 to 44 years (49.8%).

CHART 3. PERSONS TAKING PAIN RELIEVERS IN THE TWO WEEKS PRIOR TO INTERVIEW: SEX BY AGE, AUSTRALIA, 1989-90



A higher proportion of people in Queensland reported the use of pain relievers (39.3%) than other States and Territories. Tasmania reported the lowest use (31.6%) - see Table 3. Overall, proportionally more people in the capital cities reported usage of pain relievers than those living in other areas.

As shown in the following table, headache (due to unspecified or trivial cause) was the most commonly reported reason for taking pain relievers (33.7% of persons who took pain relievers). Of these people, 89.3 per cent reported that their pain relievers were not prescribed. Other commonly reported reasons for taking pain relievers included back trouble/pain, common cold or influenza and tension headaches. For most of the commonly reported conditions, the use of pain relievers had not been prescribed by a doctor.

TABLE 6. PERSONS WHO TOOK PAIN RELIEVERS IN THE TWO WEEKS PRIOR TO INTERVIEW: SELECTED REASONS FOR USE BY WHETHER MEDICATION PRESCRIBED, AUSTRALIA, 1989-90 (Per cent)

Reasons for use	All prescribed	Some prescribed	None prescribed	Total	
				('000)	Per cent
Headache - due to unspecified or trivial cause	9.5	1.2	89.3	2,026.9	33.7
Diseases of the respiratory system	21.1	1.5	77.4	968.1	16.1
Diseases of the musculoskeletal system	61.3	3.1	35.5	873.9	14.5
Headache - due to stress or tension	12.1	1.8	86.0	534.0	8.9
Diseases of the nervous system or sense organs	40.5	4.0	55.6	353.1	5.9
Diseases of the digestive system	30.0	2.0	68.0	281.9	4.7
Injury and poisoning	46.5	3.5	49.9	223.7	3.7
Diseases of the genitourinary system	17.2	3.5	79.3	223.7	3.7
Total all reasons for use(a)	26.0	1.8	72.2	6,021.2	100.0

(a) Only selected reasons for use are shown so figures will not add to totals.

Of those who took pain relievers, 75.7 per cent reported taking them less than once a week. Some 9.3 per cent of persons taking pain relievers reported that they took them 6 or 7 days per week. This pattern applied to both sexes. The most frequently reported types of pain relievers used were paracetamol (74.9% of those taking pain relievers) and aspirin (24.0%).

In total, there was little difference in the proportion of Australian born and overseas born people using pain relievers (35.5% and 35.2% respectively). Those born in the Middle East and North Africa reported the highest usage of pain relievers (39.1%), while people born in North, South and Southeast Asia reported the lowest usage (24.6%).

Of those aged 15 to 64 years, those not in the labour force reported the highest usage of pain relievers in the two weeks prior to interview (42.3%), while employed people reported the lowest (37.4%). For females, the highest usage was recorded among those unemployed (looking for work) (50.4%), whereas unemployed males had the lowest usage (29.6%). Among the occupation groups, clerks (43.7%) and salespersons and personal service workers (41.5%) reported the highest usage of pain relievers, while tradespersons (30.8%) and plant and machine operators and drivers (34.2%) reported the lowest usage. These findings may reflect the different pattern of use of pain relievers by age and sex when related to differences in labour force characteristics by age and sex.

Sleeping Medications

Five per cent of the population of Australia reported taking sleeping medications in the two weeks prior to interview. As shown in the following table, use of sleeping medications was highest among the older age groups.

TABLE 7. PERSONS TAKING SLEEPING MEDICATIONS: AGE BY SEX, AUSTRALIA, 1989-90
(Per cent)

Sex	Age groups (years)								Total
	Under 15	15-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65-74	75 and over	
Males	1.0	0.7	1.4	2.5	4.1	7.4	12.7	16.8	3.4
Females	1.1	1.5	2.5	4.4	8.1	13.7	20.9	27.4	6.5
Persons	1.1	1.1	2.0	3.5	6.1	10.5	17.2	23.4	5.0

A higher proportion of South Australians and Tasmanians reported use of sleeping medications (5.9% and 5.6% respectively) than other States, while the Australian Capital Territory and the Northern Territory, perhaps reflecting their relatively younger populations, reported the lowest (2.6% and 2.8% respectively) - see Table 3. There was little difference in the proportion of people using sleeping medications between those living in the capital cities compared with those in other areas of the States or Territories.

The main reasons for taking sleeping medications were insomnia (57.4%) and nerves, tension, emotional problems (16.0%). Most of these people (89.9%) reported their sleeping medications as being fully prescribed.

Of those people who had taken sleeping medications in the two weeks prior to interview, most reported taking medications belonging to the benzodiazepine group (69.5%), with Temazepam (22.4%), Oxazepam (18.0%) and Nitrazepam (16.8%) the most frequently reported types taken.

Almost half (48.3%) of those who took sleeping medications reported they took them 6 or 7 days a week, and almost three quarters (72.6%) took them at least once a week. Of those people who took sleeping medications 6 or 7 days a week, 83.4 per cent reported that they had taken medications at that frequency for 6 months or more (see Chart 4). This pattern was typical of both sexes.

A higher proportion of overseas born people (5.9%) than Australian born people (4.7%) reported taking sleeping medications in the two weeks prior to interview. Those born in Europe (including USSR and the Baltic States) and those born in the UK and Ireland reported the highest usage of sleeping medications (7.4% and 6.8% respectively), while those born in North, South and Southeast Asia (2.7%) and New Zealand (3.3%) had the lowest.

There were only marginal differences in the use of sleeping medications among occupation groups. Paraprofessionals reported the highest usage (2.8%), while tradespersons reported the lowest (1.4%). As shown in Table 8, usage of sleeping medications differed by employment status for all age groups, particularly those aged 45 to 64 years.

TABLE 8. PERSONS AGED 15 TO 64 YEARS WHO REPORTED USE OF SLEEPING MEDICATIONS IN THE TWO WEEKS PRIOR TO INTERVIEW BY AGE AND EMPLOYMENT STATUS, AUSTRALIA, 1989-90
(Per cent)

Employment status	Age group (years)			Males	Females	Persons
	15-24	25-44	45-64			
Employed	0.9	2.1	4.3	1.7	3.3	2.4
Unemployed	2.0	4.5	7.3	3.1	5.0	4.0
Not in the labour force	1.3	5.2	14.0	7.8	7.6	7.7
Total	1.1	2.7	8.1	2.7	5.0	3.8

Tranquillisers and sedatives

Less than 3 per cent (2.2%) of the population of Australia reported taking tranquillisers or sedatives in the two weeks prior to interview, with more females than males reporting use (2.7% and 1.7% respectively). As shown in table 9 below, a higher proportion of people in older age groups took tranquillisers and sedatives than in the younger age groups.

TABLE 9. PERSONS TAKING TRANQUILLISERS AND SEDATIVES: AGE BY SEX, AUSTRALIA, 1989-90
(Per cent)

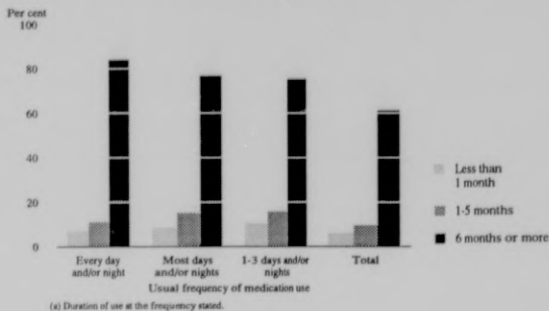
Sex	Age group (years)								Total
	Under 15	15-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65-74	75 and over	
Males	0.2	0.2	1.0	1.8	2.8	4.6	5.3	4.7	1.7
Females	0.1	0.5	1.6	2.7	4.5	6.7	7.8	6.5	2.7
Persons	0.1	0.3	1.3	2.2	3.6	5.6	6.7	5.8	2.2

The proportion of people using tranquillisers and sedatives was similar for most States, with Queensland reporting the highest usage (2.4%). The lowest usage was reported in the Northern Territory and the Australian Capital Territory (1.1% and 1.2% respectively), reflecting the relatively younger age distribution of the populations - see Table 3. Overall, there was very little difference in the use of tranquillisers or sedatives reported by people living in capital cities compared to other areas (2.4% and 2.0% respectively).

The most commonly reported reason for taking tranquillisers or sedatives was mental disorders (77.9%). Of the people with mental disorders who reported taking tranquillisers or sedatives, 72.3 per cent took them for nerves, tension, nervousness or emotional problems (94.0% of whom reported that their medication was prescribed), and 19.9 per cent took them for depression (97.4% of these people reported their medication was prescribed).

Most people who took tranquillisers or sedatives reported they were taking them every day or night (71.0%), and 86.4 per cent reported they took tranquillisers at least once per week. Of those people taking tranquillisers or sedatives every day or night, 82.8 per cent reported they had taken the medication at that frequency for 6 months or more. This pattern was similar for both sexes.

CHART 4. PERSONS TAKING SLEEPING MEDICATIONS, TRANQUILLISERS OR SEDATIVES: FREQUENCY BY DURATION OF USE(a), AUSTRALIA, 1989-90



Of those people taking tranquillisers and sedatives, 50.1 per cent reported taking medications belonging to the benzodiazepine group, and 29.5 per cent reported taking anti-depressants, principally Amitriptyline HCL, Doxepin HCL and Dothiepin HCL.

A slightly higher proportion of overseas born people took tranquillisers or sedatives in the two weeks prior to interview than Australian born people (2.5% and 2.1% respectively). People born in Europe (including the USSR and Baltic States) reported the highest usage (3.9%), while those born in North, South and Southeast Asia reported the lowest (0.7%), consistent with the age distribution of the populations.

EXPLANATORY NOTES

The 1989-90 National Health Survey was conducted during the twelve months October 1989 to September 1990 and covered approximately 22,000 private and special dwellings (eg hotels, motels, boarding houses) selected throughout Australia. Hospitals and nursing homes were excluded from the sample. Where possible, each adult member of selected households was interviewed by a trained ABS interviewer; an adult member of each household, usually a parent or guardian, was asked to provide information about children in the household.

2. The National Health Survey was conducted over a full year, with an approximately equal number of households selected for interview in each fortnight. As the estimates are based on information obtained from occupants of a sample of dwellings, they may differ from figures that would have been obtained if all dwellings had been included.
3. Information collected in the survey included medical conditions experienced, actions people had taken in relation to their health such as doctor consultations, use of medications, episodes in hospital, and aspects of lifestyle and other factors which may influence their health such as smoking, alcohol consumption, exercise and height and weight. A range of demographic and socio-economic information was also collected. Women aged 18 to 64 years were invited to complete a small additional questionnaire on specific women's health issues.
4. Details of the survey, its scope and coverage, content, methods and notes concerning the interpretation of results (including comparability with previous ABS health surveys) are contained in the publication *1989-90 National Health Survey: Users' Guide* (Cat. No. 4363.0). Information about the range of publications to be released from this survey, and the availability of unpublished results is contained in the information brochure *1989-90 National Health Survey: Products and Services* which is available free of charge from any office of the ABS.

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