

Study: Cough-cold shoppers are basket-fillers

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While such natural and homeopathic remedies as essential oils, tea and Grandma's chicken soup are becoming more prevalent for preventing and treating colds among healthy-minded consumers, OTC medication is still a key component in their cough-cold arsenal, and sales of OTC cold remedies often drive sales of such related items as tissues, hand sanitizer and nasal spray, according to a recent study by ECRM and HellaWella, a consumer healthy-living website owned by Lebhar-Friedman.

The study, based on a survey of more than 485 participants, examined how consumers perceive cough-cold products from a wellness standpoint, and how these perceptions drive their purchasing behavior. HellaWella (www.hellawella.com) — which provides news, research, product reviews and lifestyle tips for consumers interested in healthy and sustain-

able living — in January surveyed its audience on how they shopped the category.

The key with this category — as it is with vitamins, minerals and supplements (see the HellaWella VMS report in *DSN's* January 2016 issue) — is efficacy, though where the cough-cold category differs from vitamins is in the immediacy in which users expect the product's effects to take place. If a consumer is taking a weight-loss supplement, for example, she doesn't expect dramatic changes to happen immediately, but if her cough, congestion or fever aren't relieved within a short window of time after taking a cold remedy, it's on to the next product.

The payoff for those products that do work

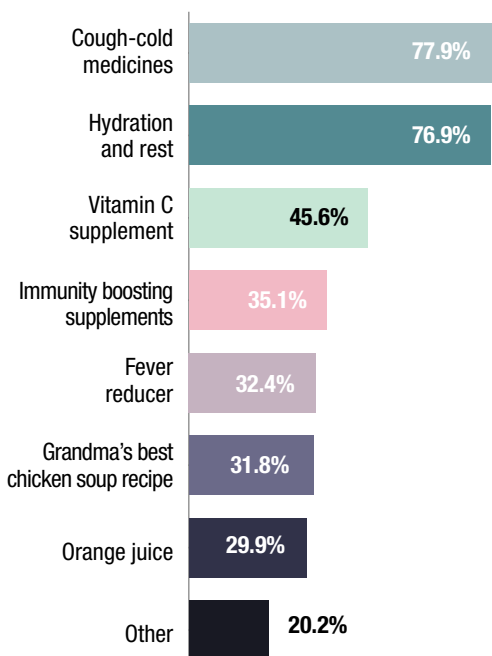
well, in addition to a loyal consumer, also is a consumer who often purchases a variety of complimentary products that address their symptoms as well, such as tissues, hand sanitizer and saline nasal spray.

Who's buying cough-cold?

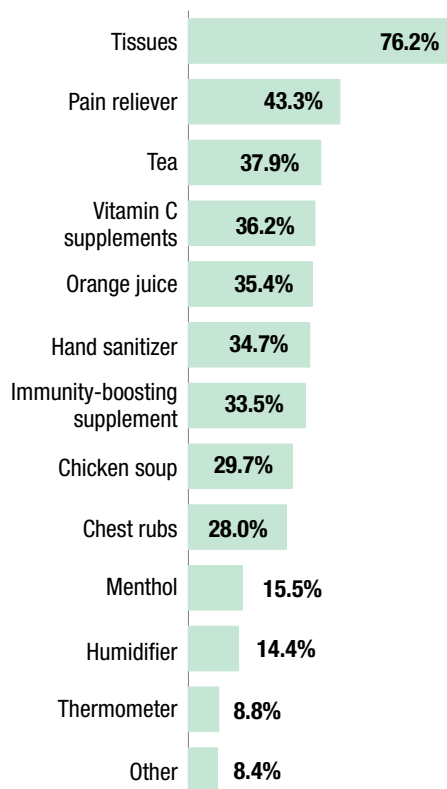
Of the 485 HellaWella readers surveyed, more than 80% said they have purchased a cough-cold remedy over the past 12 months. Of those who didn't, just over 40% said the reason was that they avoid taking any medication when they can, 30% said it was because they haven't been sick during that time period and 20% said it was because their medicine

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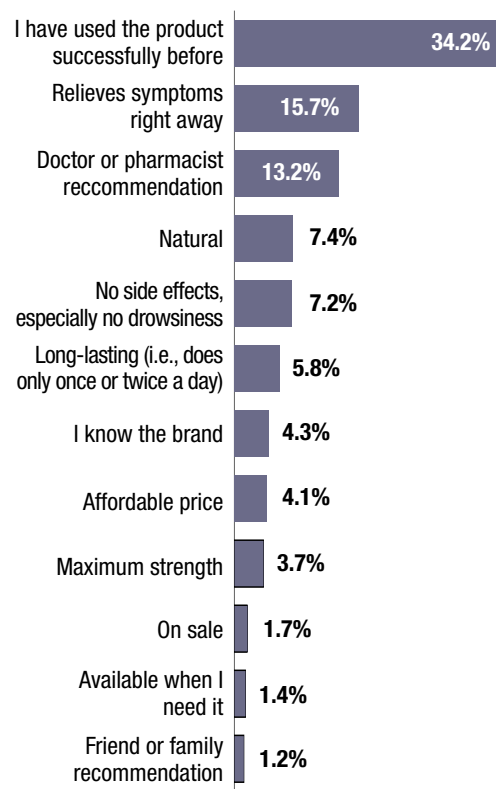
HOW DO YOU TREAT COLDS?



WHEN SHOPPING FOR COUGH-COLD PRODUCTS, WHAT OTHER TYPES OF PRODUCTS MIGHT YOU TYPICALLY BUY?



WHAT IS THE PRIMARY REASON FOR SELECTING ONE COUGH-COLD REMEDY OVER ANOTHER FOR YOU/YOUR FAMILY?

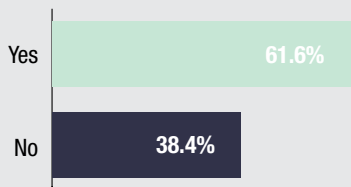


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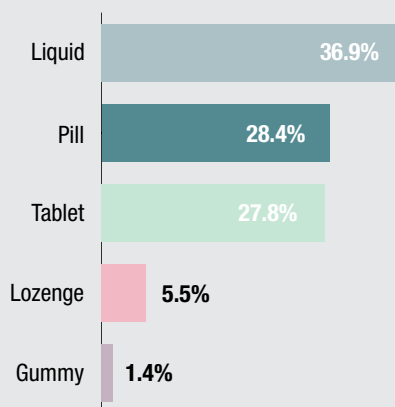


Note: Percentages reflect multiple responses

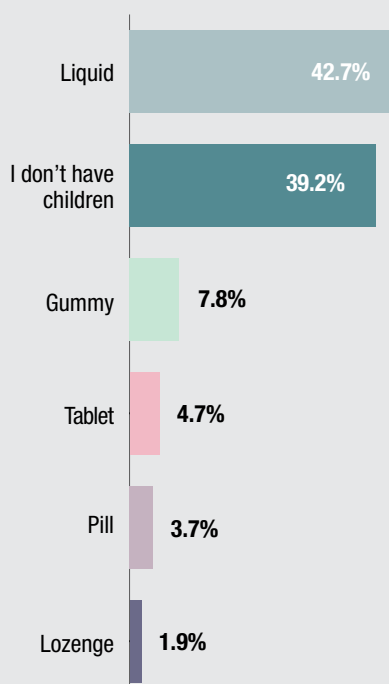
WHEN LOOKING FOR A COUGH-COLD PRODUCT, DOES DELIVERY METHOD PLAY A ROLE?



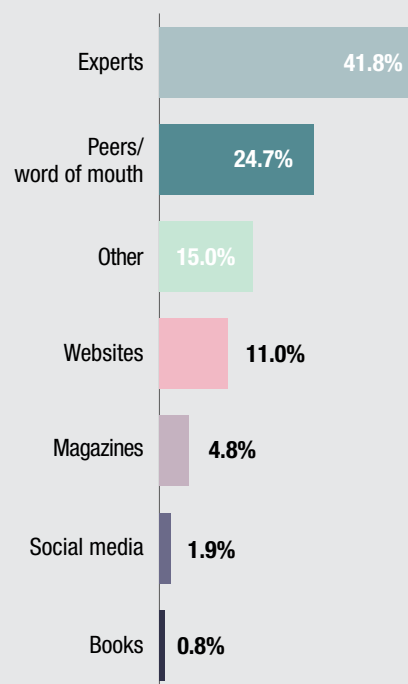
WHICH DELIVERY METHOD DO YOU PREFER?



WHICH DELIVERY METHOD DO YOU/WOULD YOU BUY FOR YOUR CHILDREN?



HOW DO YOU USUALLY LEARN ABOUT COUGH-COLD PRODUCTS?



Source: ECRM and HellaWella's Cough-Cold survey, 2015

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cabinets are already fully stocked.

When asked how they treat colds, cough-cold medication and hydration/rest were virtually neck and neck, each cited by slightly more than three-quarters of respondents. Next was vitamin C supplements, named by 46%. The other methods of treatment, each noted by approximately one-third of respondents, included Grandma's best chicken soup recipe (sorry, Mom's wasn't on the survey), fever reducers, immunity-boosting supplements, homeopathic remedies, saline nasal irrigation products, anti-bacterial essential oils and even honey lemon tea. This is an example of consumers' interest in both natural and traditional OTC remedies for relieving cough-cold symptoms; sure, Grandma's soup will probably help one's body fight off a cold, but it's not going to clear a stuffed nose as quickly as an OTC product.

Many respondents use these natural and OTC remedies in combination to address their

ailments, as one of them noted in the verbatim comments: "Hot V8 juice with lemon and Tabasco, breathing over sink full of hot water and a dollop of Vicks, with a hot towel over my head to create a tent of steam and eucalyptus vapors."

Stocking up versus impulse shopping

About two-thirds of respondents said they tend to keep cough-cold products on hand, versus approximately 40% who wait until they or a family member gets sick before shopping for them. "I stock up more than I used to," said one respondent. "This past year my whole family came down with a terrible cough, and we ended up going to the store for a basket of medicine and tissues. We didn't run out of anything after that. Now we keep tissues stocked, along with some cold medications and cough drops."

This runs counter to the seasonal means in which many brands and retailers tend to promote the category. For these stock-up consum-

ers, year-round promotions would be more effective for keeping these products front-of-mind for those times when they do run out, which may not necessarily coincide with cold season promotions.

When they do shop for cold remedies, drug is the retail channel of choice for these shoppers, cited by more than half (55%) of respondents. Less than one-quarter (24%) go to big-box or discount stores, and only 16% said they shop for cough-cold products at grocery stores.

Efficacy rules

According to the study, nothing sells cough-cold medicine better than the actual medicine itself. Thirty-four percent of HellaWella readers surveyed said their chief reason for selecting a particular product was that they have had a successful experience with that product in the past. This speaks to the value of sampling as a marketing tool over other promotional methods used in the

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category. Doctor or pharmacist recommendations also are important, cited by 13% of respondents. Other factors include claims that the products relieve symptoms right away, are maximum strength, natural or have no side effects.

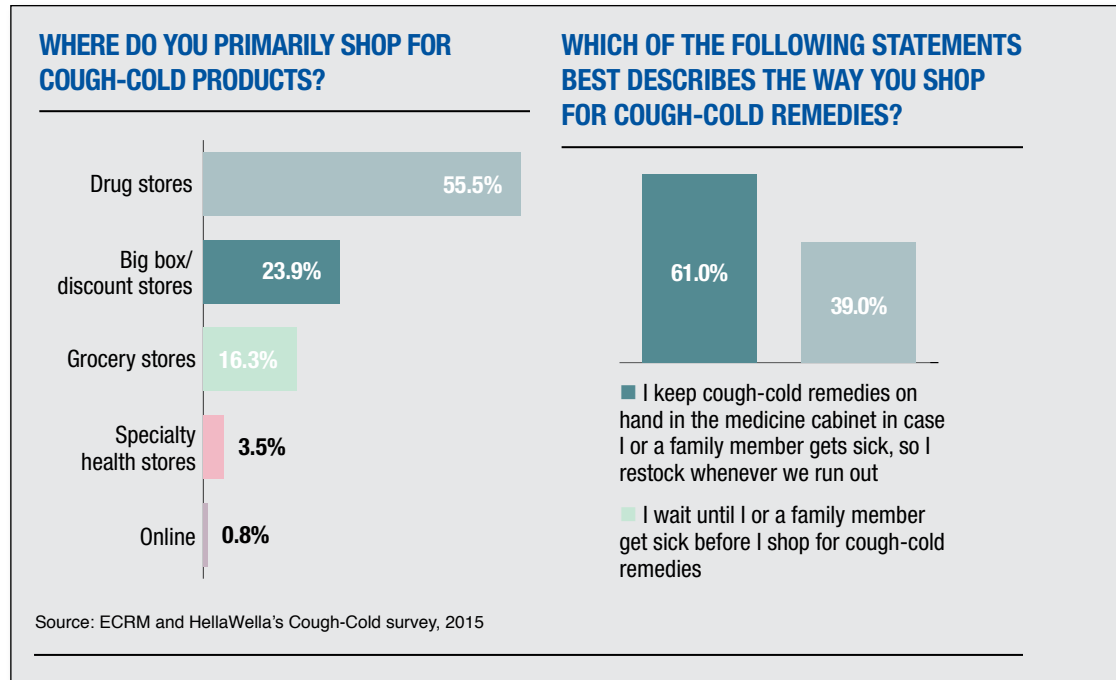
However, many consumers are wary of such claims. "There are too many extra-strength options that are supposed to do so much but some cause problems with other ailments," said one respondent. "I have some sinus problems, and most that claim to relieve sinus pressure and pain actually made it worse. I now only rely on my pharmacist and doctor recommendations only, and don't buy based on advertising and packaging."

Interestingly, affordably priced and on-sale items were least likely to impact these consumers' decisions to purchase a cough-cold product, cited by 4.1% and 1.7% respectively. "Before I purchased whatever was on sale," said one HellaWella reader. "Now I just stay with the same brand for both children and adults with what seems to work."

For the majority of people (62%), the delivery method of cough-cold medicine is a factor in their purchase decisions, with liquid being the choice of preference for most (37%). Tablets and pills were even at approximately 28%, with lozenges only cited by 6% of those surveyed. Gummies, which are becoming increasingly popular in the vitamin and supplement category, were only named as a delivery method of choice by 1% of cough-cold shoppers, likely because fewer of these products are available in gummy form. When it comes to respondents' children, though, liquid is by far the preferred choice of delivery, named by 42%, compared with tablets (5%) and pills (4%).

Bundled purchases

Since most colds bring with them a variety of symptoms — such as a runny nose, aches, pains and congestion — most shoppers of cough-cold products also purchase additional products to address them. Tissues are, by far, the most popular of these additional items, named by more than three-quarters (76%) of respondents, followed by pain relievers (35%). The next group of items most often purchased along with cough-cold prod-



ucts were preventive in nature or natural remedies, including tea (38%), orange juice (35%), hand sanitizer (35%) and immunity-boosting supplements (33%). Other items noted by respondents included products that address congestion, such as chest rubs, menthol and humidifiers.

In-person recommendations trump print and online as sources of information on which respondents base their decisions to purchase cough-cold products, with such experts as doctors and pharmacists cited by 42% of respondents, and peers/word-of-mouth named by 25%. As mentioned earlier in the study, successful experience with a cough-cold product was the strongest influence of future product purchases, and this would explain the strength of in-person recommendations, as these are typically based on direct or indirect experience in using a particular product.

What makes this particularly interesting is the fact that, as HellaWella is an online-only media brand, everyone surveyed is a regular consumer of online wellness content; they just aren't using online platforms as much for information on cough-cold products, as websites were cited as a key cough-cold information source by only 11% of those surveyed. Additionally, social media's low ranking as a source of information (just under 2%),

may be an indication of a lack of engagement by cough-cold brands on such platforms as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube, as word-of-mouth recommendations and social media typically go hand in hand. This could present an opportunity for retailers and brands to build a community among users of cough-cold products in which participants can share experiences, remedies and product reviews with each other. Add regular engagement by healthcare practitioners, and it could be a winning combination for influencing purchase decisions.

A shot in the dark

Flu shots elicit mixed responses from consumers, as evidenced by comments from participants in the study. Most healthcare practitioners recommend them, though even they admit that their effectiveness can be hit or miss. Among those consumers surveyed, more than half (60%) got a flu shot during the past year, with those who didn't claiming that they either don't believe in their effectiveness (19%), have concerns about adverse effects (14%) or else have had a negative experience with a previous flu shot. "Four-out-of-five times, I got a horrible flu after getting the shot," said one respondent. "Why pay someone to give me the flu when there is a 50% chance I'll get it on my own anyway?"