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# MailOnline

## Pill-popper nation: Prescriptions soar as we pick up more than 16 EACH every year

By [Fiona Macrae](#)

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### Britons pick up more than 16 prescriptions a year, says the Department of Health

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Britain has become a nation of pill-poppers who turn to tablets to cure every ill, official figures show.

We each pick up more than 16 prescriptions a year on average, twice as many as 20 years ago, Department of Health data reveals.

This is despite people living longer and healthier lives than ever before.

With an ever-expanding range of over-the-counter painkillers also available, the true amount of pills taken could be far higher.

A profit-hungry pharmaceutical industry has been accused of inventing and exaggerating ailments and then blitzing doctors

to boost sales.

Hyperactivity and high cholesterol are among the conditions that are said to have become increasingly medicalised.

Prescriptions for diet drugs are also soaring, creating concerns that medicines with dangerous side-effects are being used as quick fixes to problems that could be solved through a healthier lifestyle.

The NHS spent a staggering £22million a day on prescription drugs in England in 2006, a 60 per cent rise in real terms on a decade earlier.

Professor Joan Busfield, from Essex University, said that the age of stoicism was dead.

Instead, she said, Britain is becoming more like France, with its 'long-established tradition of taking medicines to heal problems'.

In her paper *A Pill For Every Ill*, published in the journal *Social Science & Medicine*, she accused the pharmaceutical industry of 'disease-mongering' and rewriting the medical dictionary.

Female sexual dysfunction, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and restless legs syndrome have been highlighted as problems that have been exaggerated in the name of profit.

More than 50million prescriptions were written for cholesterol-busting statins in 2008, an 80 per cent rise on just four years earlier.

And more than 10,000 prescriptions a week are written for anti-hyperactivity drugs, despite concerns they being used as 'chemical cosh' to calm boisterous youngsters who are causing havoc in the classroom.



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**Professor Steve Field said the drugs can help patients live longer**

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Children are also increasingly being given powerful slimming pills, with numbers increasing 15-fold in a decade.

Last month it emerged that the psychiatrist's 'Bible', the *Diagnosics and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, could be revised to include a host of extravagantly titled 'conditions'.

These include cognitive tempo disorder, which has symptoms such as passiveness, dreaminess and sluggishness - and could easily be confused with laziness.

Also up for inclusion is intermittent explosive disorder - or adult tantrums.

Professor Busfield said drug firms aggressively court doctors by regularly sending sales reps to surgeries, sponsoring

medical conferences and handing out cheap but eye-catching gifts such as branded pens and notepads.

'Companies claim such promotional activity is designed to inform practitioners about new, more effective products,' she said. 'And practitioners themselves, whilst recognising the blandishments of the industry, usually argue their prescribing is not influenced by industry's endeavours.'

'However, the evidence indicates it is and that even small gifts can influence behaviour.'

Family doctors, said the professor, would often rather give patients pills than let them leave empty-handed, while medicine-savvy patients are increasingly requesting particular drugs.

'The population is getting healthier and healthier, longevity is increasing, but we are using more and more drugs,' Professor Busfield said.

She added that the pharmaceutical industry's contribution to the economy means that the Government is unwilling to rein it in.

She concluded: 'I would argue that the expansionary tendencies that have increased pharmaceutical use so extensively are unfortunate.'

'This is not only because medicines are often very costly but also because the adverse reactions and side-effects are considerable and should not be risked if not fully justified by medical need.'

But Professor Steve Field, chairman of the Royal College of General Practitioners, pointed to other reasons for the rise in prescription drugs.

He said: 'Until the 1980s, for example, duodenal ulcers were treated by surgery.'

'But the infection that causes it is now treated with drugs.'

'Statins have reduced the number of heart attacks and led to patients living longer, healthier and more productive lives. So prescribing isn't such a bad thing.'

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For many, the prescriptions are a lifeline - diabetics, arthritics, epileptics and many more who suffer from chronic illnesses all benefit.

£7.20 per prescription is only worth paying if one has one-off problems or one prescription per month.

For those who have to get more than one monthly prescription - the magic words are

PRESCRIPTION PRE-PAYMENT CERTIFICATE.

I have to get at least 4 per month and the PPC is great.

£10.40 per month will pay for all my prescriptions and I pay by direct debit like a television licence.

You can fill in a form from your doctor, pharmacist or benefits office or apply online and once you get your certificate you can get as many prescriptions as you need without having to pay any extra.

Fabby! : )

- Mary, Wolverhampton, England, 29/3/2010 20:16

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Well I havent seen a doctor for over 30 years. The last time I did see one was because I got influenza which turned to pneumonia . I was very ill.

That was the first time I had seen the GP since I had been a baby. In fact they had to hunt for my records and they were in a filing cabinet collecting dust.

So who has been getting my prescriptions then? Also, where is this free prescription? I would have to pay.

I think this is misleading. I think a few people get a lot of drugs to keep them going and a lot of us are just names on a doctors list collecting dust in a cupboard.

- lyndy, UK, 29/3/2010 19:54

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I wonder how many people on prescription medication actually know that they are junkies? I wonder how many of them realise that they are no different from a heroin addict?

Pete, London, 29/03/2010 15.30

Not all prescriptions can just be stopped you know. I'm epileptic for example, would you recommend my stopping taking an anti-convulsant and simply risk more brain damage from head injuries, or even dying? No, probably not huh?

There are lot's of people taking meds that are quite simply essential, even if you do have to put up with a few side effects. I have to take a bunch of different meds and don't much like it but when it comes down to it, with some conditions it's the lesser evil.

- Linda, Scotland, 29/3/2010 18:42

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I pick up 1 perscription per month, because I have to, I have an under-active Thyroid. I don't like taking them, but it is a life long thing I have to do. Apart from over the counter pain-killers, I annoy the doctors, young & old, by refusing to take any of their wonder drugs, which when the box is ticked, they get a little extra from the government. I don't need HRT, I have survived OK without it so far. I will not take Statins, I know too many people who's lives have been wrecked by this so-called wonder-drug.

However, I do believe, we do not give our bodies the chance to heal, there are too many people turning up at the doctors with a sore throat or cold, who should just stay at home. Listen to the advise about taking Vit C & a pain-killer. Taking antibiotics as a cure-all is not a good idea

- Sue, Essex, 29/3/2010 17:48

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I am currently experiencing serious withdrwals having cut everything I was taken. I have migraine and whilst happy with a tablet to take when having an attack was pushed with Propranolol as a chronic preventative option. Only know do I find out how it isn't an anti migraine drug at all - but slows the heart, relaxes you and so on. It is a charactor changing drug that was pushed to me as an easy alternative. Following taking it - my Cholesterol spiked so they gave me choldestrerol busters,

these gave me side effects so as I felt I was slipping away - I quit everything . Going cold turkey from the propranolol was a mistake I have been told as I know have acute anxiety attacks, palpitations and so on - I ended up in A&E thinking I was having a heart attack. I was a normal guy with a bit of a headache for christs sake and the doctors here turned me into a wreck in a year. Damn them and damn the system that believes giving drugs is an answer to everything

- Dave, London, 29/3/2010 16:58

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As soon as free prescriptions were introduced, that's when the costs soared. Many people want a prescription for almost anything. It is common knowledge that many, particularly the elderly, have stocks and stocks of unused medicines lying in cupboards. The answer is to charge a small amount, say 50p or £1 to those already on freebies. Even if it gives pensioners a few extra pounds in their monthly pension, surely it is better than all this waste. I doubt if those paying for their prescriptions are so wasteful.

- liz, dundee angus, 29/3/2010 16:28

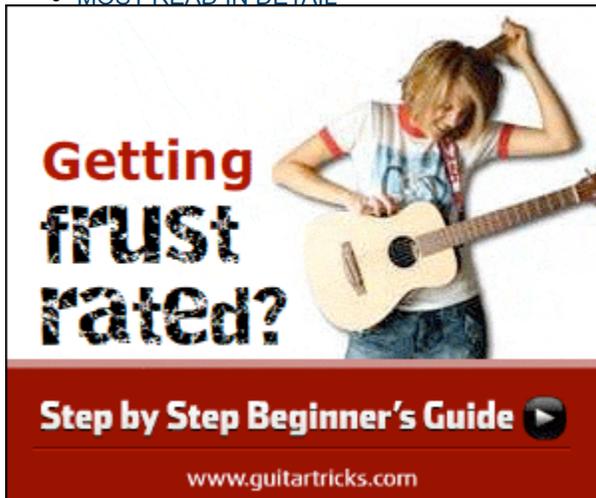
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