

Digital Health Trends in 2023: How We Seek to Heal Online

Comparing the digital
health preferences in the
US across 5 age groups

2022



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Introduction

The digital health and wellness industry is comparatively new, but its market size has grown significantly in the past few years. Even though millions of people are already using digital health tools, many do not understand the potential of how exactly the new technology can help them.

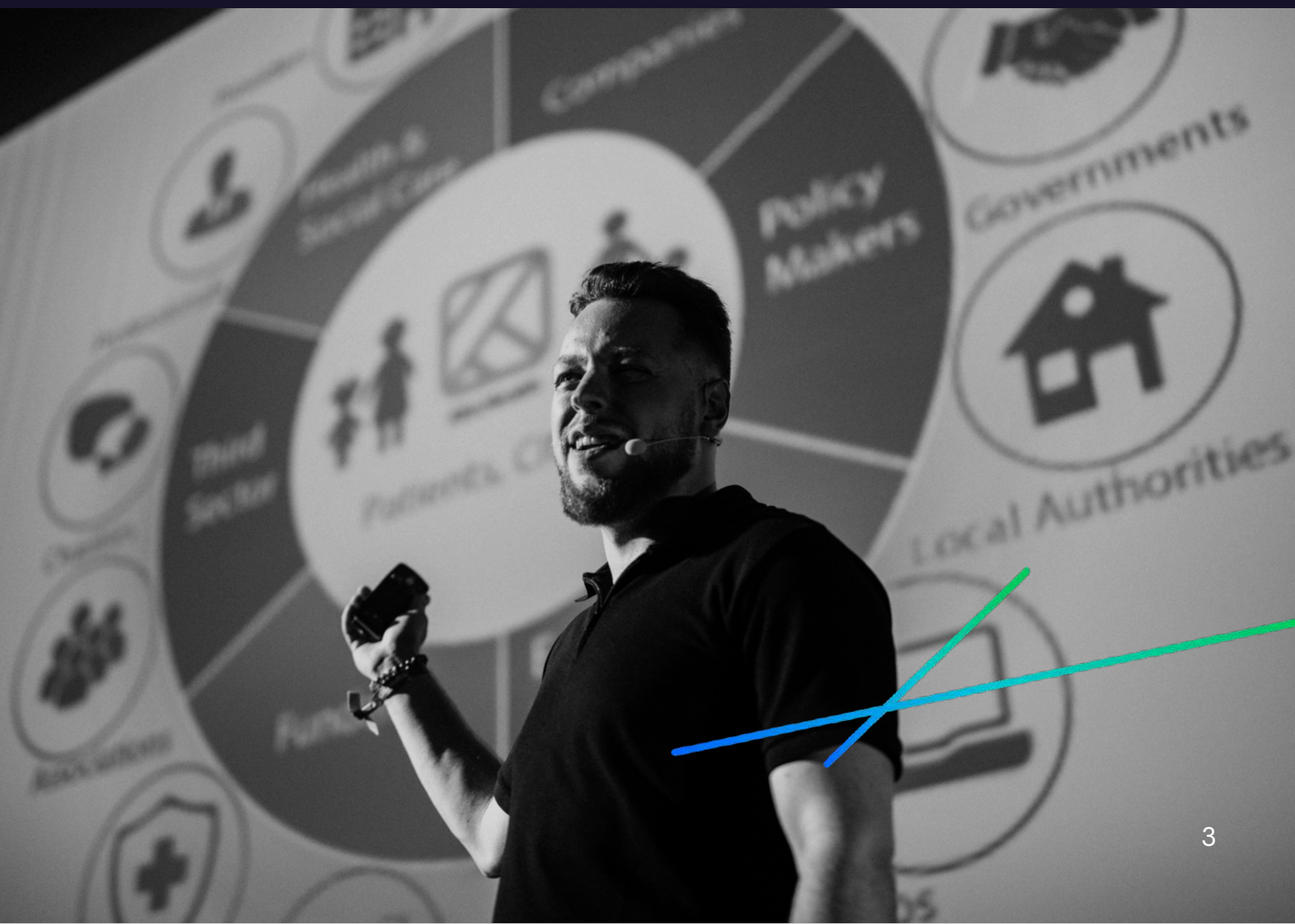
From telehealth to wearable technology or mobile wellness apps, digital health offers a wide scope of tools that help ease the medical system's burden and improve patients' health.

Digital Health Trends in 2023: How We Seek to Heal Online report aims to understand how well-informed people are about digital health solutions, what kind of digital health tools they are already using, and if there is a gap between how different generations use the technology available to them.

The report defines:

- The level of knowledge people have about physical and mental health
- The routines they keep and actions they take to stay well
- The sources that provide them advice on health and disease
- The barriers that might ruin people's health
- The types of technology they use to stay healthy

Each section contains a deep dive into the behaviors that are more common among different generations and how they interact with the new types of digital health technology.



Report methodology

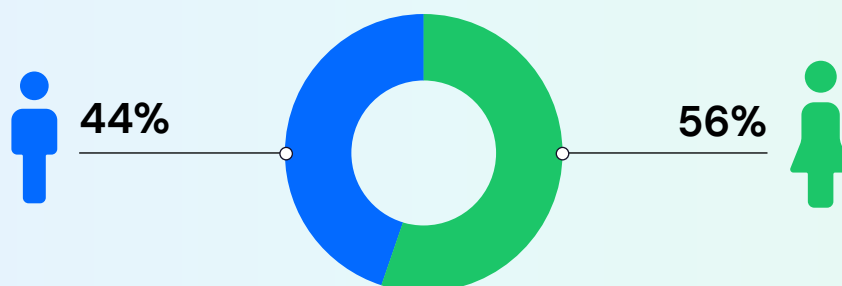
The report findings come from a survey about digital health and wellness that was carried out in 2022. Kilo Health researchers surveyed 1,004 adult internet users from the US using an online, self-complete-style interview.

The data used in this report is anonymized and aggregated to ensure the full privacy of the respondents.

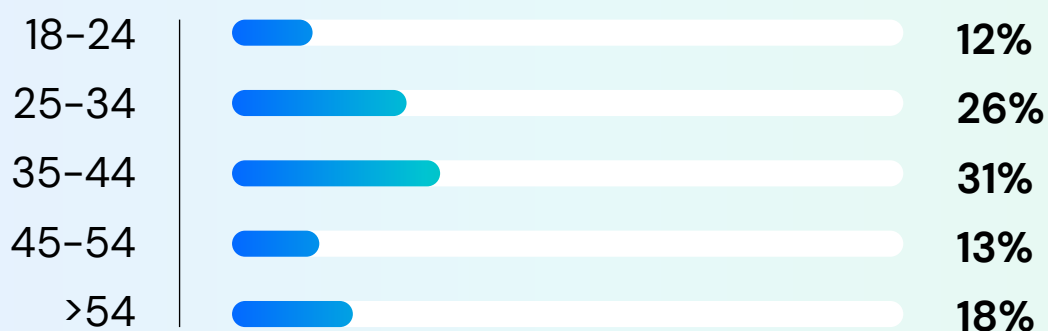
Data analysis used the post-stratification weighting method – the data was weighted by gender and age to achieve a distribution equal to the population. Other socio-demographic characteristics used in the analysis are ethnicity, educational background, marital and employment status, income level, and location.

In the table below, you can find the detailed distribution of respondents by age and gender:

GENDER DISTRIBUTION



AGE DISTRIBUTION



Key takeaways

The majority (87%) of survey respondents claim they know how to take care of their physical health, and 70% have a solid routine that helps them achieve that. 75% of respondents say they know how to manage their mental health, and 66% have a clear routine.

Less than half of the people surveyed (46%) say they take medicine exactly as their doctor recommended, and only close to 44% of people say that they do yearly health checkups. When they are sick, they are most likely to turn for advice to a doctor or a nurse (60%), online websites (39%), and ask their family or friends (34%).

They connect with their doctor through a phone call (57%), video call (42%), or text message (25%). Around a third of people surveyed already use digital health apps or wearables.

How are they behaving online?

- 93% of people were searching for information about health online at least once.
- 82% of people have tried health advice found online at least once.
- 65% of people are likely to research their symptoms online before they contact a doctor when they feel unwell.
- Online, they looked for information about healthier nutrition (55%), working out (51%), and sleeping better (45%). Less than half sought to find information about improving mental health or building better habits in general.
- 43% of people surveyed have never used any type of digital health app.
- Out of the 36% of people who said that they use digital health apps, the majority use exercise, nutrition, habit tracking, or mental health apps.
- The main reason for not using digital health apps is skepticism – 39% of people don't think they would work for them.

So, even though 56% of people surveyed associate digital health only with telehealth or virtual doctors, the majority (82%) are ready to use health advice they have found online or are likely to research their symptoms (65%) before contacting a medical professional.

FOCUS ON MENTAL HEALTH

Are there any other common trends? Mental health seems to be one of the main issues among every age group, especially the digital natives – 18–24-year-olds.

- 1 in 3 young people (34%) do not think they have a solid routine to care for their mental health.
- More than 27% of people think that a high-stress environment, depression, or other mental health issues interfere with taking care of their overall health.
- More than 10% state that they have issues with their mental health.

People aged 18–24 also face the most significant challenges in caring for their mental health, but don't have a routine that would help them take care of it. 36% have tried digital health apps but no longer believe in their effectiveness.



How healthy are we?

The people surveyed generally fall into one of three main categories.

Most respondents (35%) see themselves as healthy but claim to have some minor issues they would like to solve. 28% of people have said they are completely healthy. 1 in 3 people currently have issues with their health or expect to run into such problems soon.

More than 10% state that they have issues with their mental health.

Figure 1. **Assessment of health**

WOULD YOU SAY THAT YOU ARE GENERALLY A HEALTHY PERSON?



Who are the healthiest?

People under 35 with a higher income tend to consider themselves completely healthy. They also claim to know how to take care of their physical and mental health and have a routine for their nutrition and exercise. They seek to gain knowledge online on how to improve fitness and habits and often rely on found advice. This group of people is tech-savvy, uses various digital health apps, and owns wearable health devices.

The perception of health

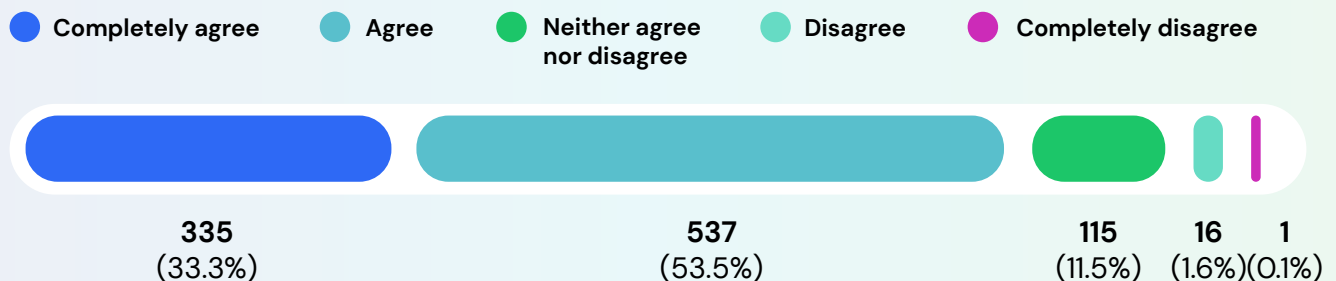
Knowing how to take care of your physical health doesn't necessarily equal being healthy. It correlates strongly with building strong routines. If people say they know how to take care of their physical or mental health, they usually have their care routine in this area.

The majority (87%) of respondents claim they know how to take care of their physical health, and 70% have a solid routine for taking care of themselves. A similar situation can be seen in taking care of their mental health. 75% of respondents say they know how to do it, and 66% have a clear routine.

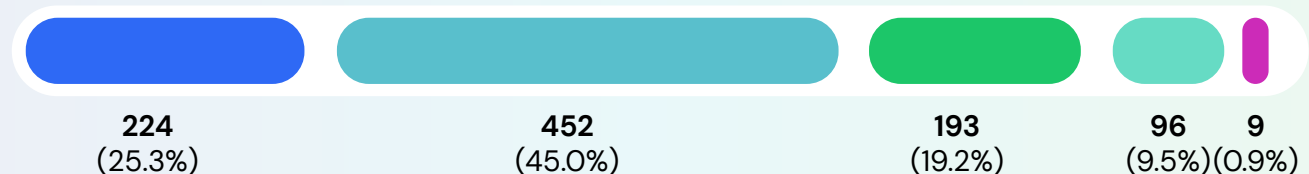
But this also means that 1 in 3 people do not have a solid routine to care for their mental health.

Figure 2. Knowledge versus routines

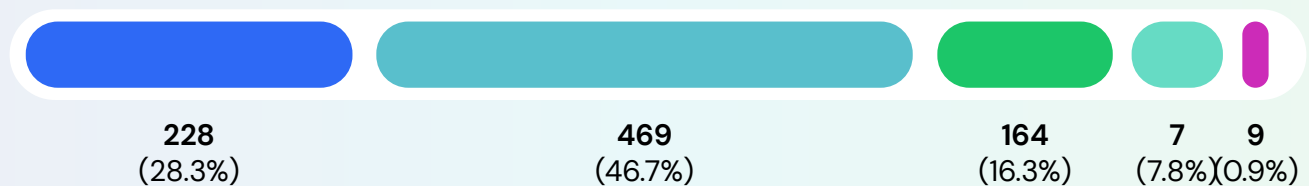
I KNOW HOW TO TAKE CARE OF MY PHYSICAL HEALTH



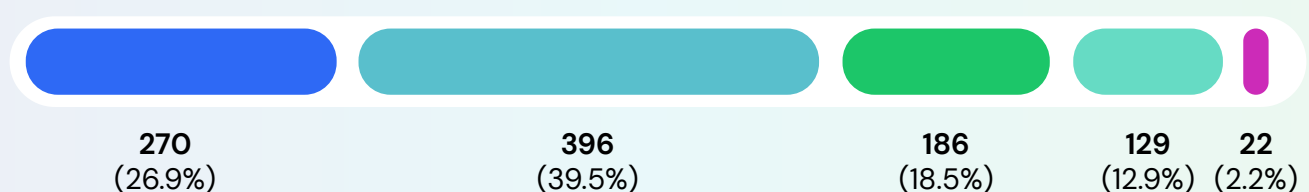
I HAVE A CLEAR ROUTINE FOR TAKING CARE OF MY PHYSICAL HEALTH



I KNOW HOW TO TAKE CARE OF MY MENTAL HEALTH



I HAVE A CLEAR ROUTINE FOR TAKING CARE OF MY MENTAL HEALTH



HOW DO DIFFERENT AGE GROUPS APPROACH HEALTH?

Middle-aged people have developed care routines

Middle-aged people (35–55+) **have the most knowledge about taking care of their mental health**. They consider themselves completely healthy and have a routine to implement that includes nutrition, fitness, sleep, and regular medical checks. The 55+ age group **has a clear routine** for taking care of their physical health and sees no barriers to taking care of their overall health.

People aged 35–44 also are more likely to **have a clear routine** for caring for their mental health.

Gen Z struggles with wellness

On the contrary, younger people aged 18–24 are significantly more likely to have no clear routine to care for their physical health (18% in the 18–24 age group vs. 10% in total). They see plenty of problems that keep them from taking care of their health, including lack of time, resources, health insurance, poor mental health, and other reasons.

The biggest challenge for gen Z is improving mental health. They **face the most significant challenges** in caring for their mental health (16% vs. 9% in total) and tend to search online for tools to improve it. **Surprisingly, 36% have tried digital health apps but are frustrated and no longer believe in their effectiveness.**

The 18–24-year-olds are more likely to have **no routine** for taking care of their mental health. People from this age group consider themselves healthy now but believe they will have problems soon.



WHY ARE YOUNGER GENERATIONS NOT INTERESTED IN USING DIGITAL HEALTH TOOLS?

Most mental health apps are boring and not created to capture young persons' attention. Also, attention span is so narrow in young people that they almost physically cannot dedicate 20–30 minutes to their mental health. Furthermore, mental health issues do not go away very fast. The younger generation usually seeks instant effect, but this change takes up to 3 months.



Kasparas Aleknavicius, MD, Head of Medical Affairs at Kilo Health

Taking action

So, what exactly do people do to stay well? 99% said that they have at least one action in their routine that helps them stay healthy. 54% of people took 1–5 actions, and 45% said to have more than 5 activities in their routine. Most people chose to do about 4 actions from the list.

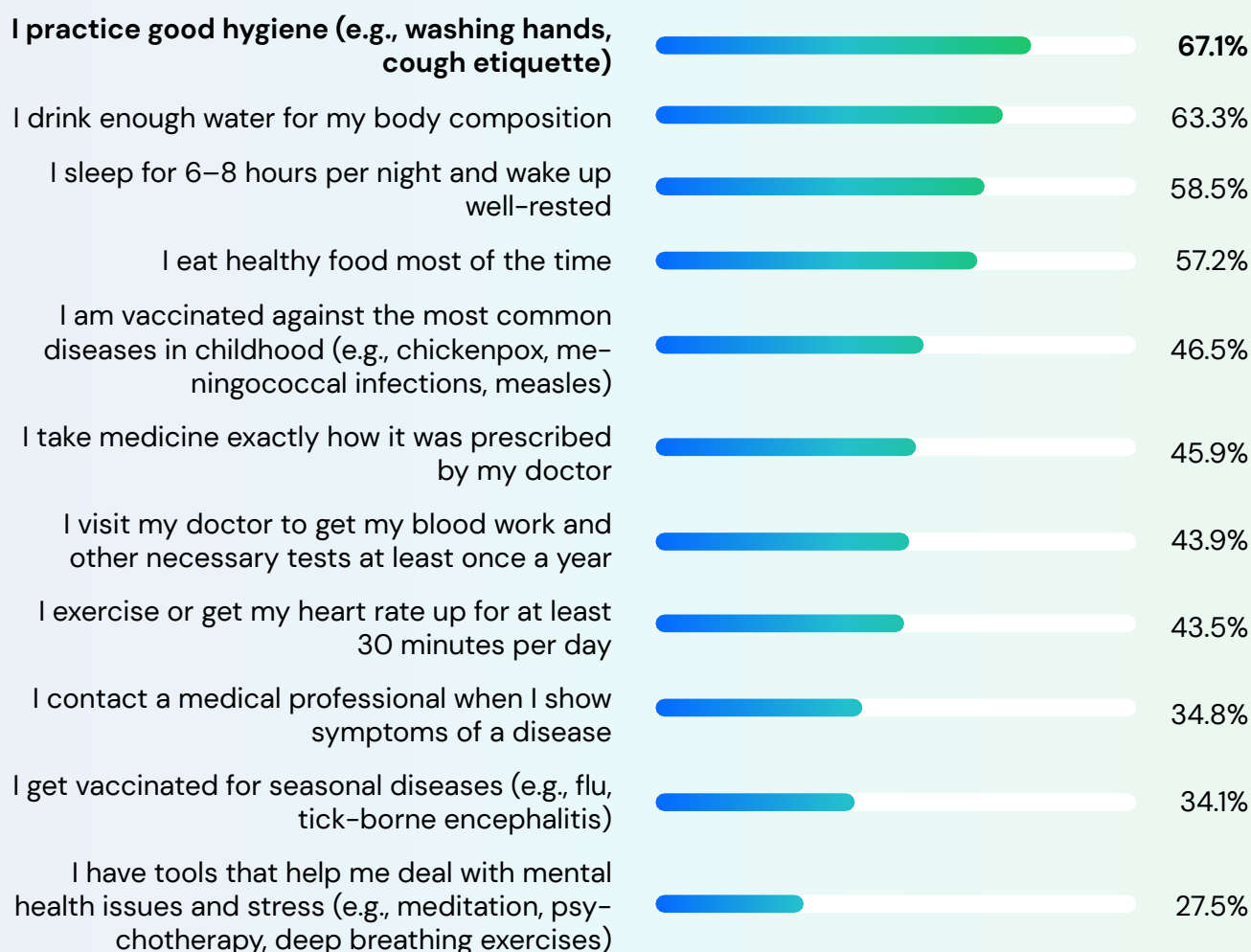
The main steps most people take in their routine are maintaining proper hygiene (67%), consuming enough water (63%), getting enough sleep (58%), eating healthily (57%), and exercising regularly (44%).

There are a couple of surprising findings on this list, too.

- Less than 1 in 3 people (27%) think they have the right tools that can help them deal with mental health issues and stress.
- Only close to 44% of people say that they do yearly health checkups.
- Less than half of the people surveyed (46%) say that they take medicine exactly as their doctor recommended.

Figure 3. **Actions taken**

WHAT OF THE FOLLOWING ACTIONS ARE INCLUDED IN YOUR ROUTINE?



Barriers

The main challenge that keeps people from taking care of their overall health is mental health issues. More than 26% of people think that a high-stress environment, depression, or other issues interfere with taking care of their overall health.



WHAT'S THE CONNECTION BETWEEN MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES AND PHYSICAL HEALTH?

Generally speaking, mental health issues interfere with daily life by creating tension, uncertainty, and stress. Mental health disorders decrease performance in different areas of life: family and social relationships, work, and school. They often come with shortness of breath, palpitations, chest pain, and discomfort, chronic fatigue – all of these interfere with physical activities.



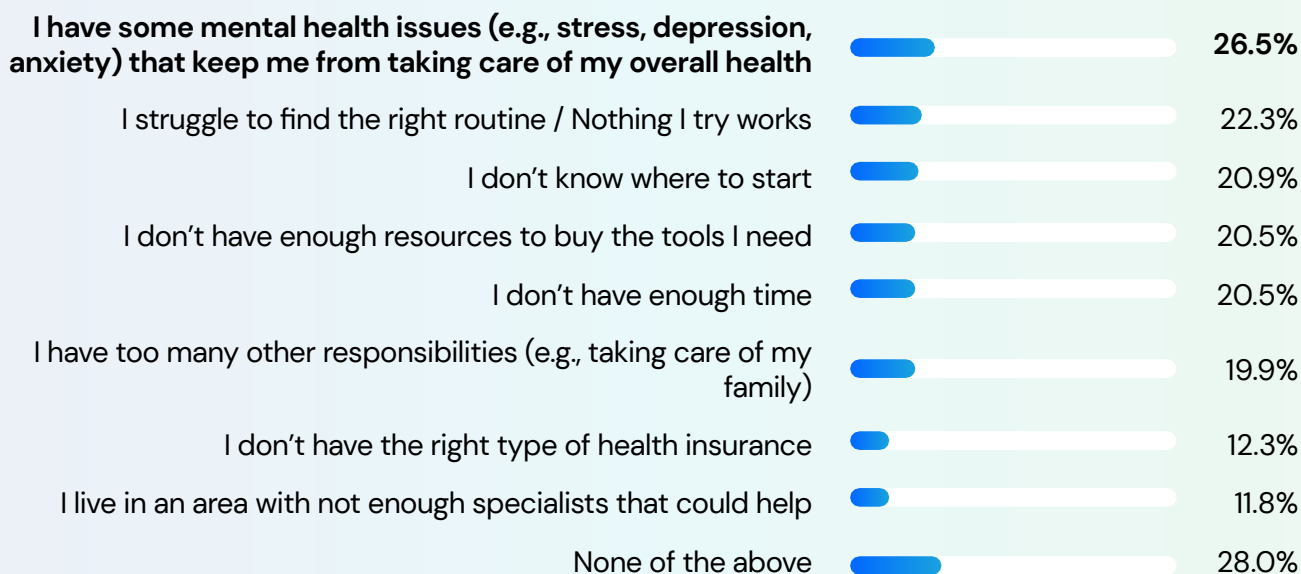
Kasparas Aleknavicius, MD, Head of Medical Affairs at Kilo Health

Generally, there are plenty of other reasons why people don't take care of their health.

- 22% struggle to find the right routine, while 21% don't know where to start or don't have enough resources.
- Around 20% say they don't have enough time or have too many other responsibilities and prioritize them over their health.
- 28% of people think they do not have any barriers keeping them from taking care of their health.
- People who are younger than 35 years see the most barriers that keep them from taking care of their health.

Figure 4. Healthy life barriers

WHAT KEEPS YOU FROM TAKING CARE OF YOUR HEALTH?



Current behavior online

So, how do people who generally know how to take care of their health but struggle with their mental health behave online?

One of the first things a person might do online is to research the symptoms they are experiencing.

65% of people rate their chances of searching for their symptoms online before contacting a primary healthcare provider as high or extremely high.



SHOULD PATIENTS RESEARCH THE SYMPTOMS THEY HAVE?

It is very good that people tend to look for information regarding their symptoms online. I usually love patients who come to my office with a little bit of background on the issues they have researched themselves. This way, they can be more easily educated about their symptoms, the interdependencies, how they occur, and how they compound into syndromes and diseases.

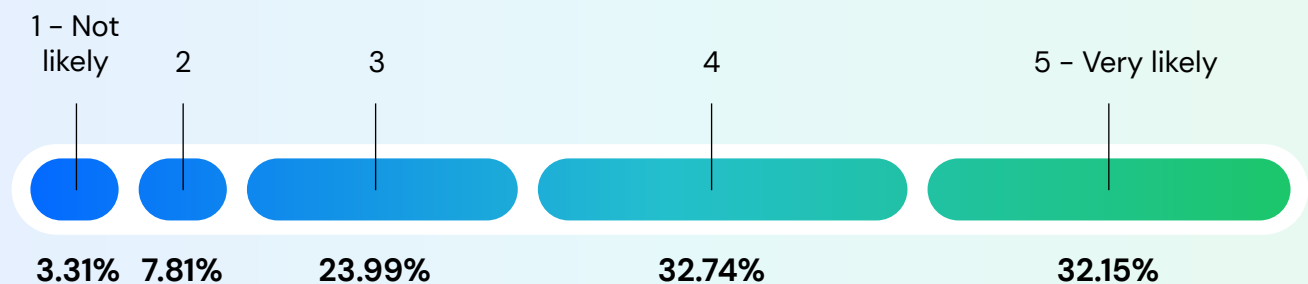
Sadly, one of the main concerns is the extra stress people tend to put on themselves when they check out unreliable information sources.



Kasparas Aleknavicius, MD, Head of Medical Affairs at Kilo Health

Figure 5. **Researching symptoms online**

IMAGINE YOU ARE FEELING UNWELL. HOW LIKELY ARE YOU TO RESEARCH YOUR SYMPTOMS ONLINE BEFORE CONTACTING YOUR PRIMARY HEALTH PROVIDER?



WHO ARE YOU GOING TO CALL?

People who experience difficulties with their mental health and live in areas with a shortage of health professionals or do not have adequate health insurance **are more likely to look for their symptoms online before contacting a primary healthcare provider.**

People looking **to manage their obesity or improve their gut health are looking for such information online first, possibly because this is a sensitive topic.**

78% of people who researched information about managing obesity or improving gut health online would first research their symptoms online. Information is most often sought in online forums and websites. These people use various digital health apps and believe in digital health solutions to help prevent disease and complement the health system.



ARE THERE ANY TRULY “SHAMEFUL” MEDICAL TOPICS?

Even though every medical care provider is there to help people, there still is evidence of fat-shaming and obesity stigma that comes from a doctor's office. One extreme example of that is “Do not weigh me” cards that invite the medical professional to reconsider their decision to weigh the person seeking care.

I believe fat-shaming comes from not putting any thoughts into how medical care providers frame their words, not from being a bad person or a bad provider.



Kasparas Aleknavicius, MD, Head of Medical Affairs at Kilo Health



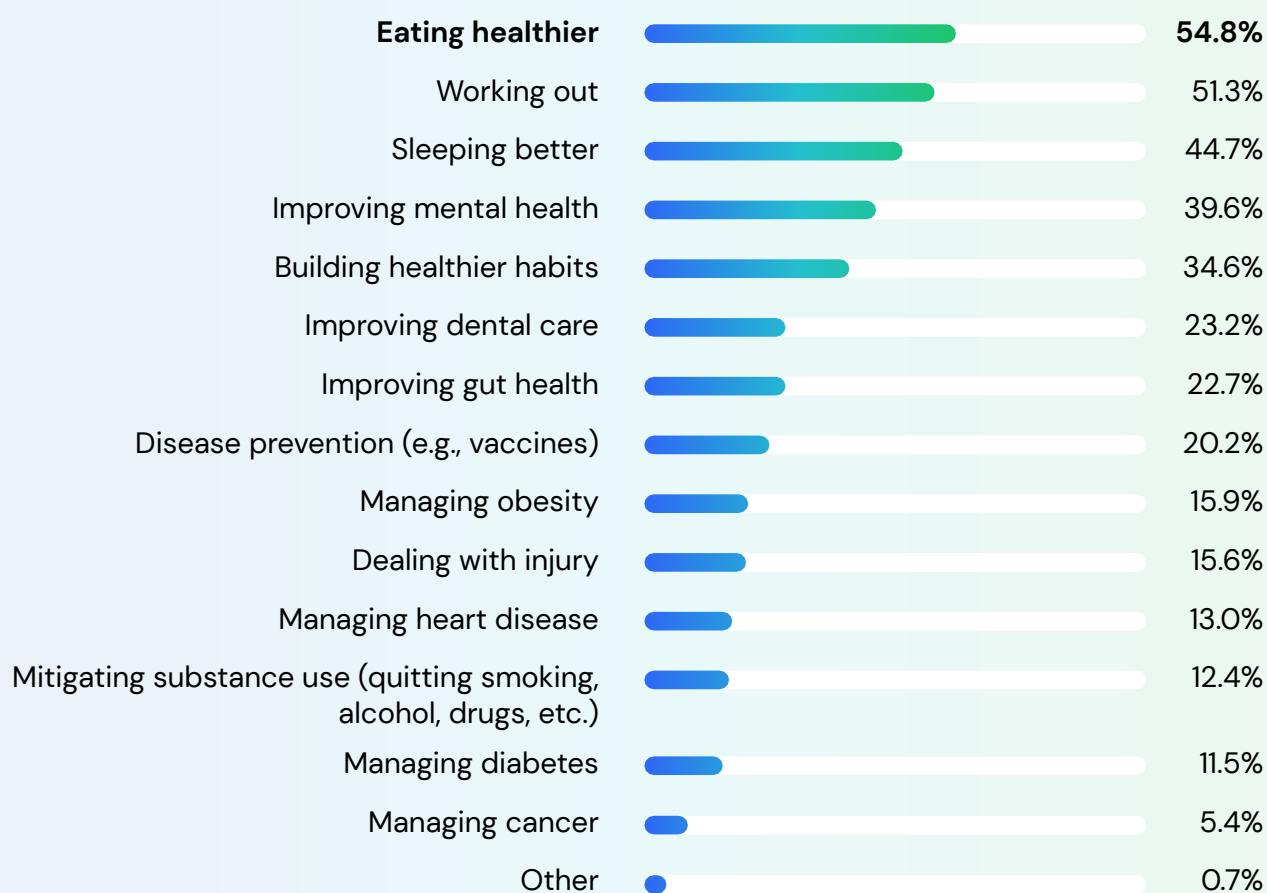
What kind of topics interest them the most?

Most of the time, people would search for information on treatment options regarding **healthier nutrition (55%), working out (51%), and sleeping better (45%)**. Less than half of the people surveyed said that they also look for advice about improving their mental health or building better habits in general.

93% of people were searching for at least one topic online. 74% were researching 1–5 different topics, while 19% were looking for more than 5 topics. In most cases, people have researched around 3 topics.

Figure 6. Searching for treatment online

WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING TOPICS HAVE YOU RESEARCHED ONLINE WITH THE INTENTION OF FINDING TREATMENT OPTIONS?

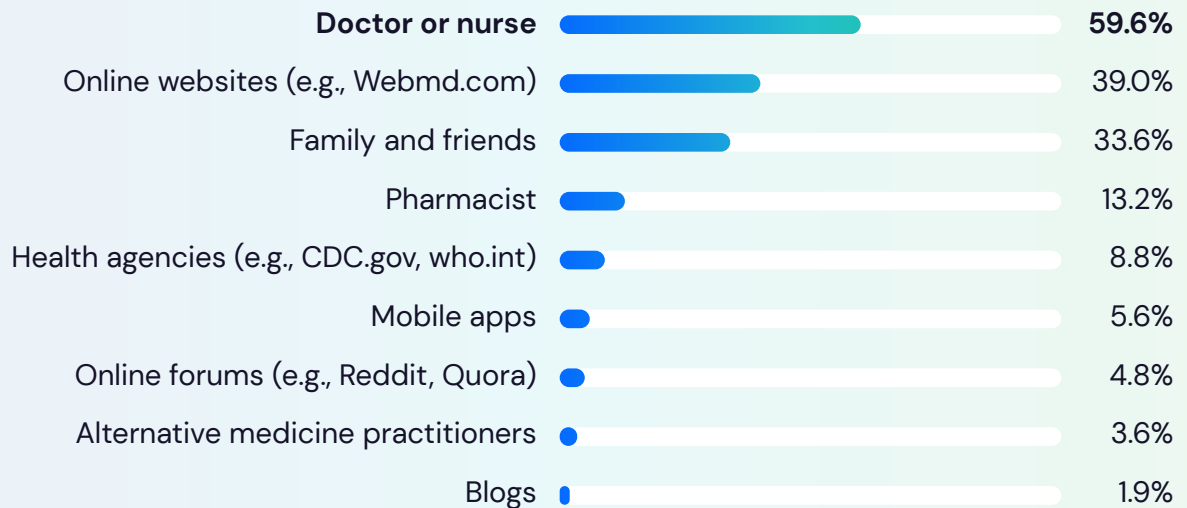


Where do they look for health advice?

The most common channel for health advice is a doctor or a nurse – **60% of people here turn to general health advice. 39% of people consult online websites, and 34% ask their family or friends.**

Figure 7. Sources for general health advice

WHERE DO YOU TEND TO LOOK FOR GENERAL HEALTH ADVICE?



How do they connect with their doctor?

Phone calls are the most popular interaction with a doctor (tried by 57% of people). Video calls take the second place with 42%, followed by text messages (25%). 80% of people surveyed have tried at least one type of digital interaction with their doctor.

Figure 8.

WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING DIGITAL INTERACTIONS WITH YOUR DOCTOR HAVE YOU EVER TRIED?



THE ELDERLY PREFER THE TRADITION

The 55+ age group (28% vs. 20% in total population) and people with low income (25%) stand out as having no digital interaction experience with their doctor.

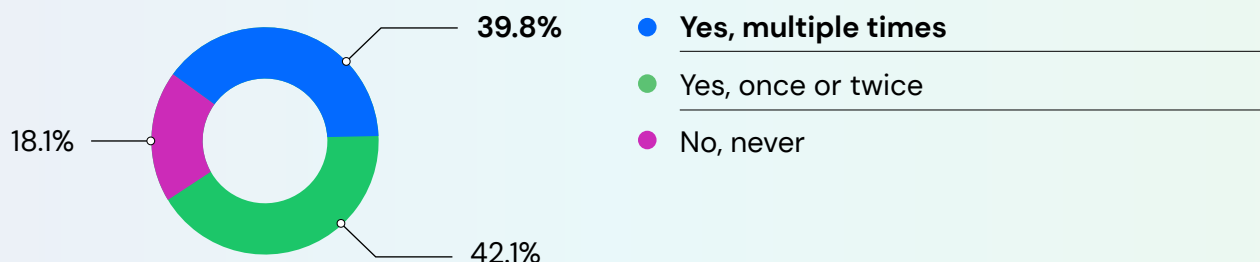
People who actively use technology (digital health apps, wearables), search for information online on various health topics, and positively evaluate digital health solutions are more likely to have multiple digital interactions with the doctor.

However, even though more than half of the people ask their doctor or nurse for advice, they also try out health advice they have found online.

82% of people said that they had tried health advice found online at least once.

Figure 9. Taking health advice from online sources

HAVE YOU EVER TRIED HEALTH ADVICE YOU FOUND ONLINE?



YOUNGER PEOPLE TURN TO PHARMACISTS

Younger people (18–24) are more likely to search online for information on nutrition, sports, mental health, sleep improvement, and dental care. Meanwhile, older people (55+) focus on specific diseases and their management or treatment, including heart disease, diabetes, and disease prevention.

Looking for information online is also directly related to people's high chances of searching for their symptoms before contacting their primary healthcare provider and more experience trying out the health advice found online.

People aged 25–34 are more likely to turn to family and friends for health advice. Meanwhile, older people (55+) with chronic illnesses seek medical attention before doing their own research.

As a source of health advice, **the pharmacist is more often chosen among the youngest group of people (18–24)**. 21% of persons aged 18–24 turn to a pharmacist for health advice significantly more often than the general population (13%).

People who live in areas with a sufficient number of health professionals or who do not have the right type of insurance are also more likely to contact a pharmacist.

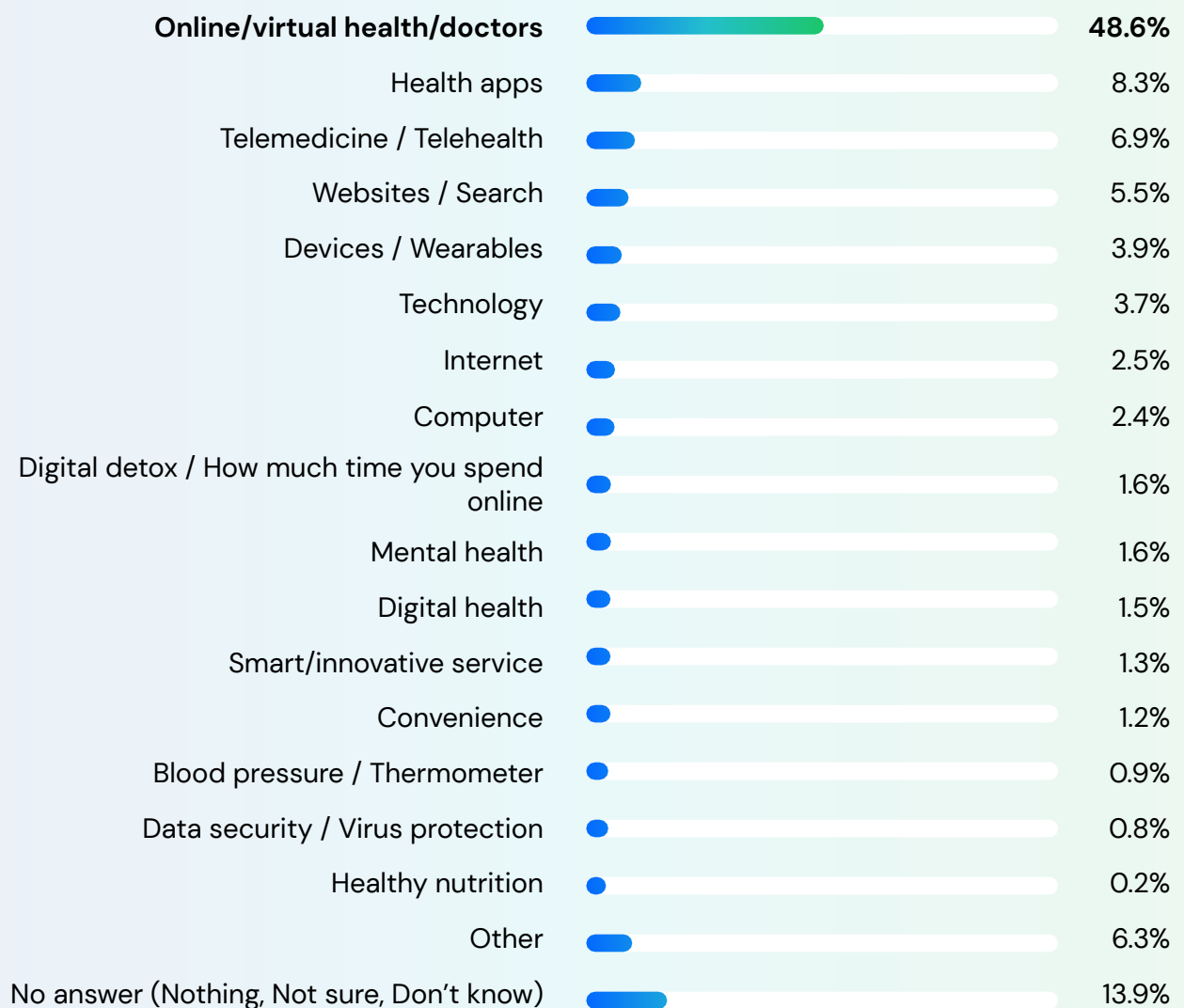
How do we perceive digital health?

Do people use digital health tools to their full scope?

More than half of the people (56%) connect the term “digital health” with reaching medical professionals online, out of which 7% think it means telemedicine or telehealth. Only 8% think it defines health apps, 6% think it’s about websites or searches, and 14% of people couldn’t find a way to describe this term.

Figure 10. Understanding digital health

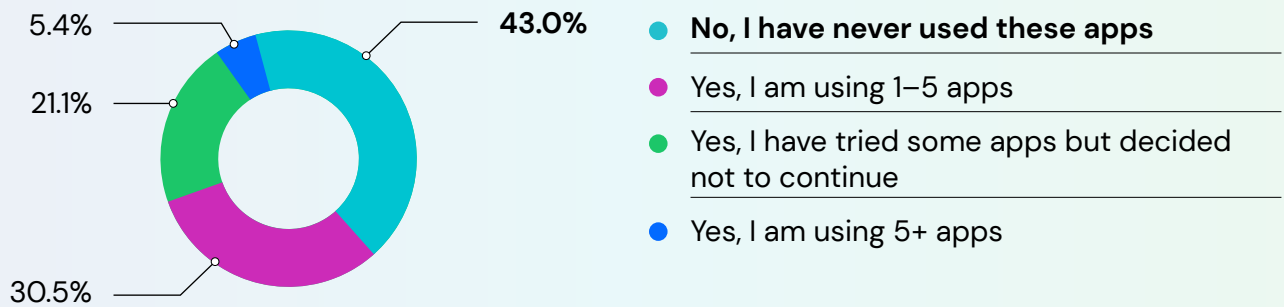
WHEN YOU HEAR THE TERM “DIGITAL HEALTH”, “WHAT IS THE FIRST THING THAT COMES TO MIND?”



36% of people surveyed currently use at least one digital health app. 43% of people surveyed have never used any type of digital health app, and 21% have tried to use these apps but changed their minds in the process.

Figure 11.

HAVE YOU EVER TRIED USING ANY TYPE OF DIGITAL HEALTH APPS? (I.E., APPS FOR HABIT TRACKING, MENTAL HEALTH, WORKING OUT, OR NUTRITION)



HOW MANY HEALTH APPS DO WE USE?

People between the ages of 25 and 34 are more likely to use digital health apps. Individuals who lack time and do not have the right type of health insurance for their health care are also more likely to use digital health apps, perhaps because this way does not require as much time and financial resources.

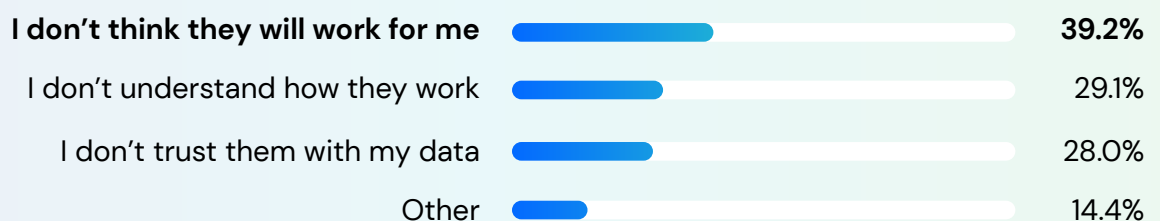
Using digital health apps is also more common among individuals seeking advice and health topics online, applying the information found there, and those who generally trust digital health solutions.

Not surprisingly, the older age group (55+) was significantly more likely to have not used a single digital health app. 65% of people over 55 are statistically more likely not to have tried any digital health apps compared to the general population (43%). This segment is characterized by minimal use of technology and a more negative attitude toward digital health solutions.

The main reason for not using digital health apps is skepticism – 39% of people don't think they will work for them. 29% don't understand how these apps work, and 28% don't trust the apps with their health data.

Figure 12.

WHY DIDN'T YOU WANT TO USE THESE APPS?



WHY DON'T PEOPLE CARE ABOUT DIGITAL HEALTH TOOLS?

Men are statistically significantly more likely to distrust the effectiveness of digital health apps.

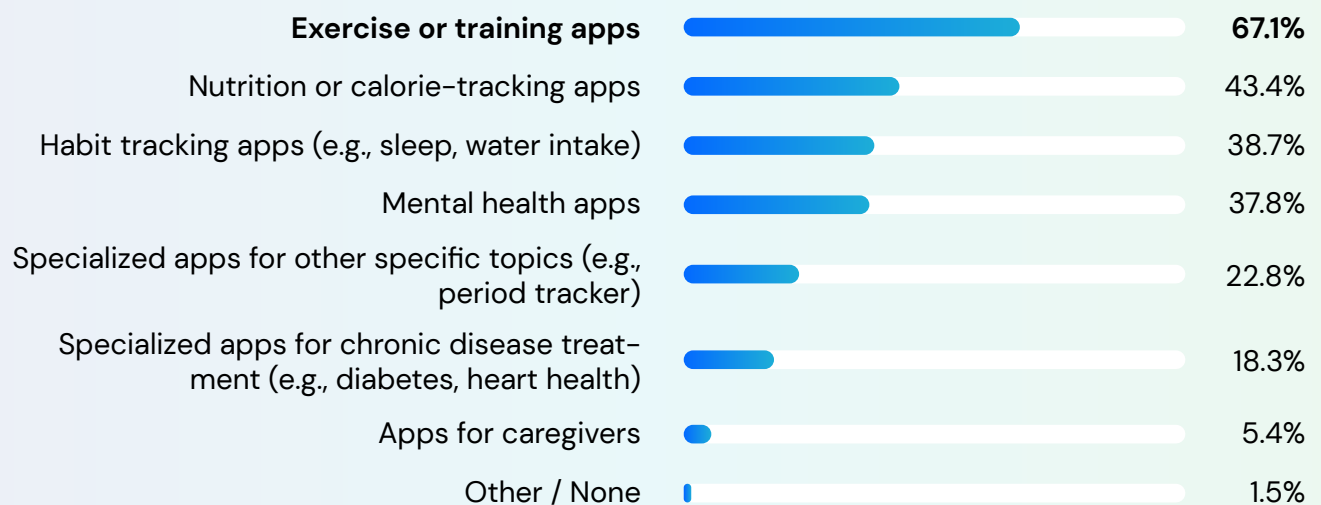
A small paradox – people who use digital health solutions rate them as suitable for disease prevention, treatment, and help for doctors but **do not currently use digital health apps because they lack knowledge of how they work.**

People who believe that digital health solutions cannot help doctors and are not effective in the long term are more likely not to use digital health apps because they do not trust them because of data security.

More than a half (67%) of the people who said they use digital health apps (36% out of the total people surveyed) said they use exercise or training apps, 43% choose nutrition or calorie-tracking apps, 39% use habit tracking apps, and 38% – mental health apps.

Figure 13.

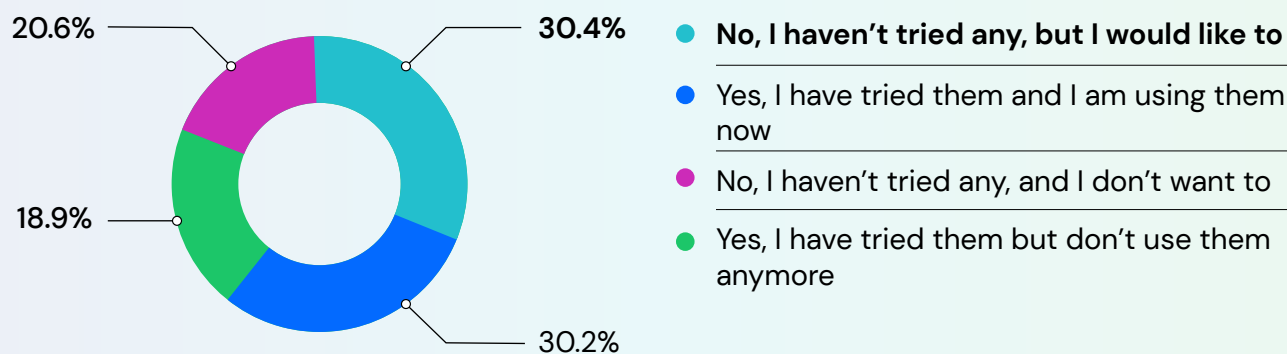
WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING TYPES OF APPS DO YOU USE?



30% of people surveyed have tried a wearable device and continue to use it now. Also, 30% say they haven't tried them yet but would like to. 19% have tried a wearable device but decided not to use one anymore.

Figure 14.

HAVE YOU EVER TRIED USING ANY WEARABLE DIGITAL HEALTH DEVICES SUCH AS A SMARTWATCH?



WHAT DIGITAL TOOLS DO WE USE?

Women are more likely to use habit-tracking apps than men. Specific topics searched online correlate directly with the purpose of the apps people use. The user segment of digital health apps overlaps very strongly with users that use wearable devices.

66% of people currently using more than 5 digital health apps also currently use a wearable device.

Almost 1/3 of people surveyed use a wearable digital health device. Often, these are people aged 25–44, with higher education and middle and high income. Users of wearable digital health devices tend to search for health information online, have extensive experience with digital interactions with doctors, use digital health apps, and positively evaluate digital health solutions.

People who are older (55+) see no barriers to taking care of their health, do not look for health advice and information online, and do not trust digital health apps or other solutions. **They have not tried and do not want to try wearable digital health devices.**

About 40% of people in each of these groups have no experience with digital health devices and would not like to gain it, which is high compared with 21% of the general population.

Conclusion and recommendations

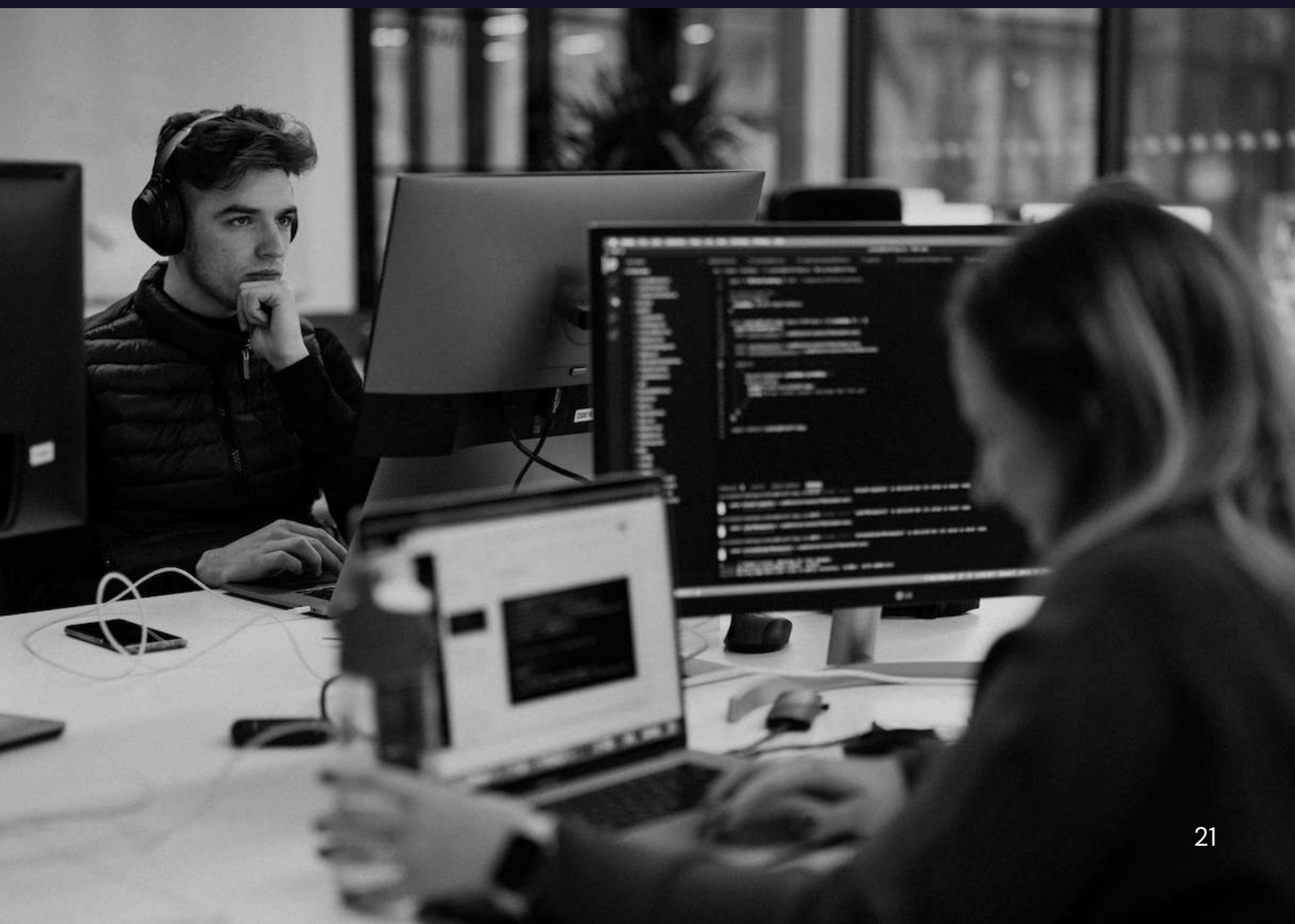
Generally, even though more than half of the people surveyed think that digital health is primarily related to virtual doctors or telehealth, the majority already use health advice they have found online or are likely to research their symptoms before contacting a medical professional.

This gap shows a need for high-quality health advice and information online that would be presented in an easy-to-understand form to ensure that patients do not get misinformed.

The tools available should be adapted for every age group since different generations have varying needs that range from trust to ease of use to convenience.

Another essential element is the focus on mental health. One in three people do not know how to take care of their mental health, and due to the stigma surrounding the topic, mental health issues start to impact other areas of life, especially among the younger people.

The survey results point out that health literacy should be one of the key ingredients that every stakeholder, including medical institutions, educators, policymakers, and businesses, should focus on to ensure the patients get the highest quality service both on-site and online.



About Kilo Health

Kilo Health is a leading digital health and wellness company with 15+ products and 4+ million customers worldwide. As of 2022, it's the second fastest-growing company in Europe on the Financial Times FT1,000 ranking, the second-fastest growing tech company in Central Europe on the Deloitte Technology Fast 50 list, and the most popular employer of 2021 on the MeetFrank recruitment app. It's a member of the DTx Alliance, Matter Community, and HealthXL.

Kilo Health has over 600+ experts and offices across 5 European cities. So far, Kilo Health has invested over 2.5 million euros into healthtech startups Medical Score, Tyler.Health, Pulsetto, and Revolab. It is constantly looking for new companies to join its ecosystem through the Kilo Co-found and Kilo Ventures programs.

4M+
Customers

15+
Products

600+
Employees



Second fastest-growing
company in Central Europe



Second fastest-growing
company in Europe

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