

# LADIES' HOME JOURNAL STUDY REVEALS WOMEN SELF- DIAGNOSE

## Over Half (57%) of Women May Be Making Decisions That Harm Family's Health

**NEW YORK, April 4, 2006**— A new nationwide study reveals that a significant number of women self-diagnose health conditions, and many of these women are likely to try self-treating potentially life threatening illnesses before seeking professional help. In fact, according to the findings, the growing access to health information is fueling this sense of confidence among women in making their own diagnosis.

*Ladies' Home Journal* magazine commissioned the study "Taking Charge: Health, Attitudes Towards Doctors, and Self-Diagnosing," to determine whether women are relying more heavily on their own diagnoses, and how this affects their family's health. According to the study, women who are often considered their family's "health gatekeepers" may actually be making decisions that could potentially harm their loved ones.

The study of 2070 women, conducted by the nationally recognized research company The Hartman Group, shows how the increasing availability of health information allows women to self-diagnose and how it changes their interactions with their doctor.

"Women have a tendency to take care of everyone in the house and themselves, and while there's nothing wrong with doing some research on your own, proper consultation with a doctor is critical to maintaining health," says Marianne J. Legato, M.D., founder and director of The Partnership for Gender-Specific Medicine at Columbia University and medical advisor to *Ladies' Home Journal*. "Every patient deserves an attentive, well-informed physician who will answer questions clearly; if this is not the case for you, change doctors."

Among the key findings from the survey:

More than half (57%) of all women say they self-diagnose at least sometimes; nearly two-thirds under the age of 40 (62%) stated as such; 53% of women age 50+ self-diagnose.

- Among younger women (aged 25-39), 33% say they self-diagnose more now than they did five years ago; compared one out of five women (22%) aged 40-64.

Why are these women self-diagnosing? Access to more relevant health information (61%); more confidence in their own medical judgment (39%); more experienced and knowledgeable about health issues (38%); and seldom feeling they need medical care (33%).

- Among women who self-diagnose less than they did five years ago, the key reasons for their behavior include life changes that have made them more cautious (54%); they have found a doctor they like and trust (34%); and, their health issues have become more complicated (30%).

Self-diagnosing serious illness: Nearly half of all women surveyed (45%) say that they would first try to diagnose and/or treat sharp pain in the upper abdomen of their children before seeking medical attention, a potentially serious risk.

- Overall, between 15% and 45% of all women say that they would first diagnose and/or treat conditions in their children themselves, even with potentially serious conditions ranging from a very severe headache complex to sharp abdominal pain lasting 4 hours.

- One out of ten women (11%) with a post graduate degree or higher say that they would wait and see if the conditions improved before calling medical assistance for a child suffering from a very severe headache complex.

#### Women and their Doctors

- Nearly two-thirds (63%) of women surveyed have encountered inattentive, unreceptive or inaccessible doctors in the past five years.
- Only one out of five women (22%) aged 25-39 see doctors as trusted allies. Similarly, only 26% of women aged 40-49, and 33% of women aged 50-64 state as such.
- While almost two-thirds (63%) of women aged 50-64 say that they can talk freely with their doctor, only half (53%) of women aged 25-39 stated as such.
- As women experience more medical conditions, they are more likely to have positive attitudes towards doctors. For example, 63% of women who have experienced five or more medical conditions state that doctors genuinely care about their health.

“As women become increasingly more educated medical consumers, it has clarified for us at *Ladies’ Home Journal* how vital and life-saving our role is as a popular and mainstream source of health information,” says Diane Salvatore, Editor-in-Chief. “American women are at the front lines of health care, for themselves and their families, and we take seriously our role as a trusted source they use to make decisions about their family’s well-being and safety.”

The “Taking Charge: Health, Attitudes Towards Doctors, and Self-Diagnosing,” study was conducted from September-October 2005 by The Hartman Group, Inc., a Bellevue, WA based consumer research and consulting company, and is based on a nationally representative sample of 2070 women aged 25-64. The margin of error for the survey is  $\pm 2$  percentage points at a 95% confidence level.

“We’ve known about consumers’ self-diagnosing and self-treating for some time, but most of our information has come from reports on specific diseases and our own ethnographic work,” said David Moore, PhD, Director of Quantitative Research at The Hartman Group, Inc. “This is the first time anybody has systematically studied self-diagnosing in a large-scale survey, and we were struck by just how widespread the phenomenon is.”

#### About *Ladies’ Home Journal*

Founded in December 1883, *Ladies’ Home Journal* magazine has been inspiring, informing and entertaining women for 120 years. Published monthly by Meredith Corporation ([www.meredith.com](http://www.meredith.com)), *Ladies’ Home Journal* has a circulation of 4.1 million and a readership of 14.8 million. The magazine’s interactive online companion, [www.lhj.com](http://www.lhj.com), has 1.8 million unique visitors and 20 million page views each month.

#### About The Hartman Group

The Hartman Group, Inc., founded 1989, is a full-service consulting and market research firm offering a wide range of services and products focusing on health, wellness and consumer research. We specialize in the analysis and understanding of consumer lifestyles - including how they LIVE, where they SHOP and what they USE. The company’s headquarters are located in Bellevue, Washington.

#### Contact:

**Holly Fussell**

**212-551-7053**

**[Holly.fussell@meredith.com](mailto:Holly.fussell@meredith.com)**

**Zoe Lampel**

**212-455-1077**

**[Zoe.lampel@meredith.com](mailto:Zoe.lampel@meredith.com)**