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Younger adults give pharma ads more influence in doctor conversations

Article

The data: Younger consumers are more likely than older generations to discuss new medicines and drugs they've seen advertised with their doctors, according to the M3 MI 2026 MARS

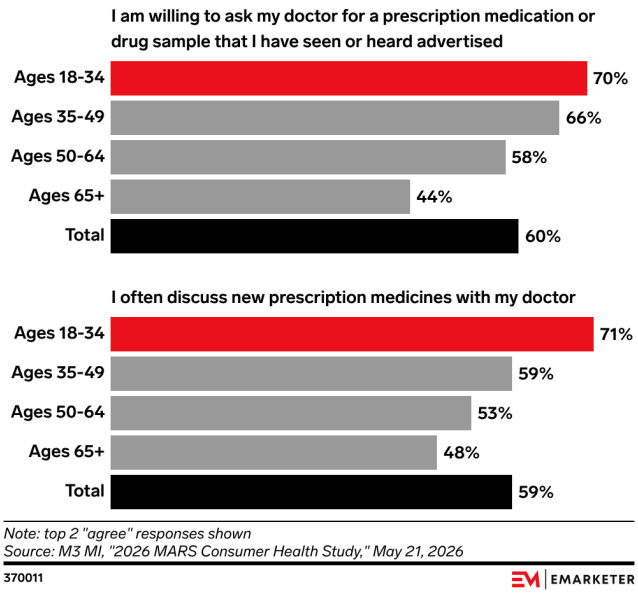
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Consumer Health survey, released in May.

- 70% of adults ages 18 to 34 say they're willing to ask their doctor about a medication they've seen or heard advertised, versus 58% of those ages 50 to 64 and 44% of those 65+.
- 71% of adults ages 18 to 34 say they often discuss new medications with their physician, compared with 53% of those ages 50 to 64 and 48% of those 65+.

Younger Adults Are More Likely to Discuss New and Advertised Drugs With Their Doctors

% of US adults who agree with select statements about new prescription drugs, by age, March 2026



Note: top 2 "agree" responses shown
Source: M3 MI, "2026 MARS Consumer Health Study," May 21, 2026

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Why it matters: About one-quarter of consumers surveyed by M3 say they don't rely solely on medication brands recommended by their physicians. Many patients are shaping treatment discussions before appointments based on what they see in pharma ads and in digital media.

At the same time, pharma marketing may be less effective at prompting older adults to discuss new medications with their doctor. Many older patients have established treatment regimens for managing their chronic conditions, making them less inclined to consider newer therapies on their own. And while older adults still encounter drug advertising on TV, younger consumers are more exposed to pharma messaging across a range of digital channels, such as social media, creator content, and AI platforms, creating more opportunities for product awareness.

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Implications for pharma marketers: The doctor's office is where advertising can ultimately influence prescribing decisions. For older adults, the challenge is not simply reaching patients but giving them the confidence to initiate medication discussions. Because many older patients take multiple medications, messaging that explains how physicians evaluate drug interactions, side effects, and patient eligibility may reduce hesitation about discussing new treatments. This requires much more individualized messaging, like positioning a therapy as an option for patients whose symptoms remain uncontrolled or whose needs have recently changed.

More broadly, point-of-care marketing deserves greater investment, as marketers can reach patients at a critical moment, introducing treatment information while they are actively discussing healthcare options with their physician.

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