



# Britain's Health Story

SixthSense™

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## Table of Contents

Table of Figures .....	3
Introduction & Scope.....	4
Methodology.....	4
Abbreviations .....	5
Report Summary.....	6
Britain's poor self-image.....	6
...is it justified? .....	6
The 'big C' is the biggest worry .....	6
Obesity apathy .....	6
You're stressing me out! .....	7
What's your poison? .....	7
Turning to technology .....	7
New strategies for pharmacies .....	7
Going and staying grey .....	8
Healthy (or not so) attitudes.....	8
Background/Market Drivers .....	9
Ageing population not unique to Britain.....	9
Greying society.....	10
Marketing implications .....	11
Britain in Comparison with Other European Countries .....	12
Cancer .....	13
Heart disease.....	14
Obesity .....	16
Smoking.....	17
Respiratory diseases.....	17
Lifetime Trends – Visiting the Doctor/GP .....	19
Number of GP surgery/consultation visits .....	19
Time lag – needing an appointment, making an appointment .....	21
Time lag – making an appointment, seeing doctor/GP .....	22
Time spent waiting in reception.....	23
Time spent with doctor/GP .....	24
Marketing implications .....	24
Lifetime Trends – Hospital Visits .....	26
A&E visits.....	26
Time between noticing symptoms/illness and visiting A&E .....	26
Time spent in A&E waiting room .....	27
Average overnight hospital stay.....	28
Marketing implications .....	28
Lifetime Trends – Accidents, Broken Bones & Stitches .....	29
Accidents in a lifetime .....	29
Most common accidents.....	30
Lifetime Trends – Illness & Well-Being .....	32
Minor ailments.....	32
Stress.....	33
Marketing implications .....	34
Medical Concerns .....	35
The 'big C' is greatest worry.....	35
Diet and lifestyle link.....	35
Concerns of the heart .....	36
A weighty issue.....	36
Marketing implications .....	37
Smoking and Alcohol Consumption.....	39

Smoking ..... 39  
    Marketing implications ..... 39  
Alcohol consumption ..... 40  
    Marketing implications ..... 41  
Attitudes Towards Health ..... 43  
    Self-assessment of health ..... 43  
    Taking responsibility ..... 44  
    Caring for the elderly ..... 45  
    Current health assessment ..... 45  
    Marketing implications ..... 46  
Appendix ..... 47  
    Questionnaire ..... 47

## Table of Figures

Figure 1	Life expectancy in selected EU countries, 2011 estimates .....	9
Figure 2	Life expectancy of other selected countries, 2011 estimates .....	10
Figure 3	Age structure of the UK population, by gender, 2005-2015 .....	11
Figure 4	How Britons view themselves on a series of health factors in comparison with France, Germany, Italy and Spain .....	12
Figure 5	Cancer rates in selected EU countries, 2008 .....	13
Figure 6	Cumulative risk of getting cancer in selected EU countries by gender, 2008 .....	14
Figure 7	Standardised death rate (SDR) from ischaemic heart disease for selected EU countries, 2009 .....	15
Figure 8	Obesity rates among adults, 2008 .....	16
Figure 9	Percentage of regular daily smokers in selected EU countries, aged 15+, 2009 .....	17
Figure 10	Standardised death rate (SDR) from respiratory disease, 2009 .....	18
Figure 11	Number of GP surgery/consultation visits in the past year and over an adult lifetime .....	19
Figure 12	Number of GP surgery/consultation visits in the past year, by gender .....	20
Figure 13	Number of GP surgery/consultation visits in the past year, by region .....	20
Figure 14	Time between feeling ill/noticing symptoms/having an injury and making appointment with doctor/GP .....	21
Figure 15	Time between feeling ill/noticing symptoms/having an injury and making appointment with doctor/GP, by age .....	21
Figure 16	Time between making appointment and seeing doctor/GP .....	22
Figure 17	Time between making appointment and seeing doctor/GP, by region .....	22
Figure 18	Time spent waiting in reception for doctor/GP appointment .....	23
Figure 19	Time spent waiting in reception for doctor/GP appointment, by region .....	23
Figure 20	Time spent with doctor/GP .....	24
Figure 21	Average number of visits to A&E in a lifetime .....	26
Figure 22	Time lapse between first feeling ill/noticing symptoms/having an injury and going to A&E .....	26
Figure 23	Time spent in A&E waiting room, waiting to be seen .....	27
Figure 24	Average time spent in A&E waiting room, waiting to be seen, over a lifetime .....	27
Figure 25	Average number of nights spent in hospital over a lifetime .....	28
Figure 26	Average number of accidents suffered in a lifetime .....	29
Figure 27	Average number of accidents suffered in a lifetime, by gender .....	29
Figure 28	Accidents suffered in the past year .....	30
Figure 29	Accidents suffered in the past year among those who suffered accidents .....	30
Figure 30	Average number of broken bones over a lifetime .....	31
Figure 31	Average number of times stitches are needed and number of stitches over a lifetime .....	31
Figure 32	Average number of colds per year and over a lifetime .....	32
Figure 33	Average number of back pain incidents per year and over a lifetime .....	32
Figure 34	Average number of breakouts/spots per year and over a lifetime .....	32
Figure 35	Average number of migraines/severe headaches per year and over a lifetime .....	33
Figure 36	Average number of tummy upset incidents per year and over a lifetime .....	33
Figure 37	Average number of stress incidents per year and over a lifetime .....	33
Figure 38	Health issues people are worried about .....	35
Figure 39	Weight of the nation – self assessment of own weight .....	36
Figure 40	Are you a smoker? .....	39
Figure 41	Alcohol consumption .....	40
Figure 42	Type of drinker .....	40
Figure 43	Planned changes in alcohol consumption .....	41
Figure 44	Personal assessment of own health compared with one, five and ten years ago .....	43
Figure 45	Personal concern over own health compared with one, five and ten years ago .....	44
Figure 46	Who Britons feel should be responsible for the health of the nation .....	44
Figure 47	Perception of care for the elderly .....	45
Figure 48	Level of health in the UK .....	45

## Introduction & Scope

When it comes to health matters, the British do not regard themselves in a very favourable light in comparison with other European countries and in some cases the reality does justify such a low self-image. Obesity levels in the UK are worryingly high, in fact the highest within the EU countries, whilst incidences of heart disease and cancer also feature quite highly. It is not surprising then that cancer is the number one concern for respondents, closely followed by heart disease.

Advances in digital technology present numerous opportunities to improve services within the healthcare sector as well as providing consumers with tools to help them live a healthier lifestyle. Smartphone health apps are becoming increasingly popular, allowing consumers to monitor, self-test and self-diagnose. The well-documented ageing population continues and as such presents challenges to a range of resources including healthcare for the elderly, providing opportunities for private medical care providers.

This YouGov SixthSense report explores Britons' state of health, focusing on lifestyle factors such as diet, smoking and drinking, and the incidences of developing serious illnesses such as heart disease and cancer. Attitudes towards various health concerns are also identified, and we will explore how Britons regard themselves in comparison with those in other European countries. Consumer incidences and experiences of visiting GP surgeries and hospitals are also detailed. The report has been compiled using a combination of primary and secondary data sources.

## Methodology

The results for two surveys have been utilised for this report:

- Britain's Health Story Survey, for which fieldwork was conducted among a nationally representative sample of 1,043 UK adults aged 18+ over the period 16-19 December 2011.
- Britain's Health Story Update Survey, for which fieldwork was conducted among a nationally representative sample of 2,099 UK adults aged 16+ over the period 6-9 January 2012.

Averages in the report were based on the second survey (6-9 January 2012), which was conducted among those aged 16 and over. Some averages, therefore, refer to a respondent's adult life, while others, where noted, refer to a respondent's entire lifetime.

Please refer to notations in each sub-section for any further methodology notes.

## Abbreviations

<b>A&amp;E</b>	Accident and Emergency
<b>ASR</b>	Age standardised rate
<b>BHF</b>	British Heart Foundation
<b>CHD</b>	Coronary heart disease
<b>CIPD</b>	Chartered Institute of Personnel & Development
<b>CVD</b>	Cardiovascular disease
<b>EU</b>	European Union
<b>GP</b>	General Practitioner
<b>HSE</b>	Health Survey for England
<b>NHS</b>	National Health Service
<b>OECD</b>	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
<b>ONS</b>	Office for National Statistics
<b>WHO</b>	World Health Organization

## Report Summary

### Britain's poor self-image...

The average Briton's self-image is severely lacking: when asked to compare themselves with those in other European countries on a selection of health issues, the stereotypical British cynicism shines through. In general, Britons see themselves as unhappier, more stressed, more overweight and less healthy than their European neighbours.

### ...is it justified?

In reality, some of this poor image is justified: the average Briton is more than twice as likely as their Spanish and French counterparts to die from heart disease, and the UK is top in the obesity charts when compared with the rest of Europe, with its citizens being at least twice as likely as the French, Italians and Spanish to tip the scales. However, while over a quarter of Britons have a chance of developing cancer at some point in their life, this compares favourably with the French and Germans.

### The 'big C' is the biggest worry

When it comes to concerns about health matters, respondents are more worried about cancer than any other health issue (one in four is personally concerned), followed by heart disease (one in five). The provision of more frequent and accessible health checks is one way to help to allay some of these concerns.

### Obesity apathy

While over half of respondents (59%) consider themselves to be overweight to some degree, only 19% agree that they are personally concerned about their weight problem, which suggests a high level of apathy when it comes to weight issues.

The latest figures show that 61% of adults and 28% of children in England in 2009 were overweight or obese; of these, nearly a quarter of adults and 14% of children were obese. Furthermore, expert predictions place obesity levels at 48% of men and 42% of women by 2030.

Further measures are clearly needed to educate the public about the far reaching effects of obesity. Options range from a hard-hitting 'fat tax' through to social media campaigns, reduced prices for healthy foods and a personal bracelet that records the wearer's eating habits and activity levels.

## **You're stressing me out!**

Stress levels are taking their toll on the nation; a quarter of respondents for this report stated that they are currently affected by stress/anxiety. Furthermore, the recent Absence Management survey undertaken by the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD)/Simplyhealth found that stress is the most common cause of long-term sickness absence for employees.

In the current economic climate, job insecurity is rife as the spectre of redundancy and pay freezes looms large. Employees are typically working longer hours driven by the potential threat of losing their jobs.

## **What's your poison?**

Trends in alcohol consumption show a nation either continuing to drink at the same levels or trying to cut down. However, a quarter of those aged 18-24 are drinking more than they did last year, and the phenomenon of binge drinking is rife in this group. At the other end of the scale, a fifth of those aged 55+ are daily drinkers and are least likely to agree that drinking is bad for you.

## **Turning to technology**

Developments in digital technology present numerous opportunities within the healthcare industry by taking pressure off GP surgeries and providing consumers with more control over their health. These include self-testing and diagnosis smartphone apps, GP consultations via video conferencing, GP surgeries liaising with customers via apps to give up-to-the-minute information on appointment times, and remote care for the elderly utilising home surveillance/monitoring equipment and digital reminders to take medication.

The growing popularity of mobile health apps (ranging from blood pressure and cholesterol tests to diabetes monitors and ECG readings) present opportunities for healthcare brands and government bodies to develop their own range of certified healthcare apps.

## **New strategies for pharmacies**

Pharmacies have adapted to new retail trends; the Co-op pharmacy has responded to the rise in online retailing by launching a new website offering customers online health advice via an online Harley Street doctor, diagnosis and treatment. Whilst at the other end of the scale, Lloyds Pharmacy has created a new in-store experience for consumers; the new Health Villages provide convenient access to a range of health specialists and services all under one roof with the emphasis on personable, knowledgeable and friendly staff.

## **Going and staying grey**

The UK's ageing population shows no signs of abating, a phenomenon which will impact on a range of resources, including healthcare provision, and as such place a greater strain on an already struggling NHS. Opportunities exist for private medical care to step into the breach and for other medical services to adapt their offer to cater better for the ageing society.

## **Healthy (or not so) attitudes**

When it comes to the health of the nation the overriding opinion is that government (local or central) is responsible (60%), whilst only just over a fifth believe that the responsibility lies with individuals.

When asked about their current health half of respondents stated that they feel healthy, whilst the other half stated that they have felt better (42%) or felt very unhealthy (8%).