

The AI Patient Journey

How patients really use AI to manage their health

Findings from a Luth Research study | 2026

How we studied it

A blended approach: we watched what patients actually did, then asked them why.

1 Passive Digital Tracking

n=1,538

consumers, tracked as they moved between AI tools, search engines, and health sites.

783 chronic condition **755** occasional illness

2 Quantitative Survey

n=537

patients surveyed on the motivations and trust behind their source choices.

Adults 18+ who used AI for health info in the past 12 months.

The big idea

AI hasn't replaced the patient journey. It has reconfigured it.

Patients aren't choosing AI over trusted health sources. They're building a hybrid workflow, using AI to start the search and returning to verified sites to make decisions. The result is a new kind of patient: the hybrid researcher.

Meet the AI health consumer

45

Average age. Skews Millennial (42%) and Gen X (34%).

**56% /
44%**

Female / Male split among AI health users.

94%

are also heavy users of standard search engines and social media.

55%

turn to online forums like Reddit for peer validation.

AI is rarely used alone

8 in 10

AI users research their condition with AI in combination with other sources, not on its own.

Health info sites are the #1 companion to AI

When AI users reach for a second source, they reach for verified health sites first, ahead of every other option.



Why patients lean on each

AI: for speed

47%

to research a doctor's explanation more deeply

44%

find it easier to ask AI than to ask their doctor

40%

find it easier to interpret and understand

Health sites: for trust

57%

are very familiar with the source

56%

trust it to provide reliable information

42%

value that it's validated by clinical professionals

AI wins the first question. Trusted sites win the decision.

As patients move from first symptoms toward a doctor's appointment, reliance shifts from AI to verified health sites.

■ AI reliance decreases ■ Health site reliance increases



Directional; reliance shifts across the journey.

Hybrid researchers are the most valuable patients

3x

more time spent researching chronic conditions than patients who use AI alone.

27%

more likely to be hybrid researchers among patients diagnosed 11+ years.

Verified sites remain the anchor

Even as AI use grows, patients return to sources they trust to validate before deciding.

73%

of AI users verify what AI tells them against a trusted source before acting.

57%

choose health sites out of familiarity with the source

56%

trust health sites to provide reliable information

42%

value that the information is validated by clinical professionals

What it means

1

The rise of the hybrid researcher

80% of AI users treat AI as a companion, not a replacement. Verified health sites are their #1 companion source.

2

A clear division of labor

AI wins fast, upper-funnel discovery. Trusted sites win the validation that drives treatment and care decisions.

3

A trust and engagement premium

Hybrid researchers spend 3x longer and are more experienced, and they lean more heavily on the health sites they trust as decisions get closer.

Uncover What Drives Decisions.

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