

# HOW MANY PILLS DID YOU TAKE THIS WEEK?

When it comes to health, there seems to be a quick fix for everything. But are we popping more pills than we should? We asked four women to reveal how many tablets they take in a week, and how the medication affects their lives

Words Eulogi Rheeder  
Photographs Adriaan Oosthuizen



AKOUSUA FENING  
**14**  
pills a week



JANE BALL  
**7**  
pills a week



FAGHMEDA MILLER  
**15**  
pills a week



ALEXIA LEETZ  
**49**  
pills a week



**Alexia Leetz, 36**  
Events coordinator, only takes holistic and natural pills

**MY 7 PILLS A DAY:**

- 2 Manna tablets for stabilizing blood sugar levels
- 1 multivitamin
- 1 olive leaf supplement, an immune booster

- 1 Bio-Femina tablet, for hormone levels
- 1 Probi-flora capsule (every second day)
- 1 iron tablet (every second day)
- 1 alkaline powder, to reduce acid levels

I've had a few terrible medical experiences in the past, which made me rethink my health and approach to medicine. When I was 25 I had adenoid and tonsil surgery. I was so overmedicated that it took hours for

me to completely gain consciousness after the operation. I was put on a three-month course of antibiotics; two capsules three times a day. They made me feel horrible. I resolved then and there to be more proactive and to find natural alternatives to conventional medicine.

I asked for advice from several holistic practitioners and my local health shop, and I also looked on line to validate what they told me. Through my research I learnt that I was putting "bad" things into my body. As a result, I stopped taking my oral contraceptive, gave up red meat and cut back on caffeine (I'm still working on the sugar). I now also take a combination of natural vitamins and supplements, and drink loads of water and a cup of loose-leaf green tea every day.

My health has improved dramatically since making these changes. I've lost 20kg, my skin, hair and nails are in better condition and I've also managed to avoid looming high blood pressure problems. I haven't been ill for a number of years - the last time I took antibiotics was six

**'My friends think my health routine is a bit silly but they can't deny the proof: I am much healthier than they are'**

years ago. Some of my friends and family think my health routine is a bit silly but they can't deny the proof: I am much healthier than they are.

Although I do take tablets every day, I wouldn't encourage reckless pill popping. It's become the norm for us to take over-the-counter tablets for just about anything. Now I think twice about the pills I put in my body. I'm also aware that some natural remedies can have adverse effects and what works for me may not work for you. It's about understanding and listening to your own body.'

**'I knew the day would come when my body wouldn't be able to fight on its own any more'**

be able to fight on its own any more and I would need to start taking ARVs.

I started ARV treatment eight years ago after my doctor recommended it, but it made me horribly sick so I decided to stop. Then, two years ago I became very ill with shingles. My body simply couldn't beat infections any more, so I started taking ARVs again in August last year.

It hasn't been easy, but I'm lucky to be on a new type of ARV. Previously, a dose of ARVs made up a handful of pills; now it consists of only two tablets. I have to take them at night as they cause drowsiness and nausea. There are other side effects such as insomnia, severe chest pains, loss of appetite and moodiness. When I experience

these, I think back to when I was seriously ill and in hospital - it makes me appreciate how much better I feel on the ARVs.

I think many South African women are lax about taking their medication, whatever their reason for being on it. Perhaps they don't realize how detrimental it is to your body to skip pills or stop taking your medication. As someone who is HIV-positive and a health promoter, I want to challenge those mind-sets. I'm a member of Positive Heroes, an educational and self-help action campaign that raises awareness around HIV/AIDS, and I want to inspire and encourage other HIV-positive people. Taking ARVs has definitely changed my life for the better.'

For more info visit [Positiveheroes.org.za](http://Positiveheroes.org.za).

**Jane Ball, 35**  
Medical risk assessor

**MY 1 PILL A DAY:**

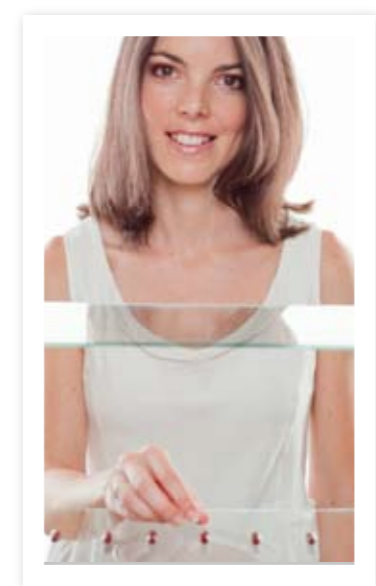
- 1 oral contraceptive

I'm a trained pharmacist and having scientific knowledge of medication, vitamins and supplements has definitely influenced my view on them. I believe that women are often happy to take something that can be bought at a pharmacy without knowing exactly what it is they're taking.

Medicine and supplements can of course improve your health, but not all pills are necessarily good for you. There's a huge vitamin and supplement culture in South Africa but I think women should do more thorough research into what they're taking: ask someone knowledgeable how it will affect your body and what the ingredients are; most importantly, get them to explain it to you in language you understand.

I only take one tablet a day and I'm comfortable with that. I was raised to believe you should only ever take medication when you really have to. My parents never took medication until very recently - and that's only because they are getting older. I have a two-year-old daughter and as a mother I'm definitely more aware of the trend of dishing out pills. My husband is also a pharmacist and we avoid giving our

**'Women are often happy to take something that can be bought at a pharmacy without knowing exactly what they're taking'**



daughter any type of medication unless it's essential. I hope that when she grows up she'll take the same approach - a healthy lifestyle can be achieved without popping a pill. But it's a personal choice - everyone has to decide for themselves.'

**DO WE TAKE TOO MANY PILLS?**

Dr Jacqui Davies, founder of The Wellbeing Way, says: 'I often see patients who are causing more damage to their systems by the amount of pills they are taking, natural or medical, than if they weren't taking anything at all.'

We seem to think that anything natural will do our bodies only good but this is not the case. My belief, after studying both Western medicine and the alternatives, is that everything has its place, but each person is different.

The best medicine is preventative medicine. We need to address not only what we eat and how active we are, but our emotional and spiritual sides too. Before you put anything into your body, get proper guidance from a health-care professional to see what will suit you as an individual.' For more info go to [Wellbeingway.org](http://Wellbeingway.org).



**Faghmeda Miller, 43**  
Health promoter, is HIV-positive and on antiretroviral treatment

**MY 2 PILLS A DAY:**

- 2 antiretroviral tablets (1 prescribed sleeping tablet on a bad day)

Fifteen years ago I was diagnosed with HIV. At first there was no need for me to be on medication, and I was happy about that as I've never been one to take pills. When I get a headache or feel ill I prefer to rest rather than take a painkiller. I'm also a spiritual person and rely on God for strength and health. But I knew the day would come when my body wouldn't

**Akousua Fening, 29**  
Cosmetics buyer, only started taking medication four years ago

**MY 2 PILLS A DAY:**

- 1 pill to treat an ulcer
- 1 multivitamin (2 prescribed painkillers for menstrual cramps on a bad day)

I've always been skeptical - and still am to a degree - about taking any form of pill. My dad is a doctor and has always discouraged me from taking anything unless I am seriously ill. My parents believe that prevention - healthy eating, regular exercise and getting enough sleep - is better than cure. And it seemed to work because I was hardly sick as a child.

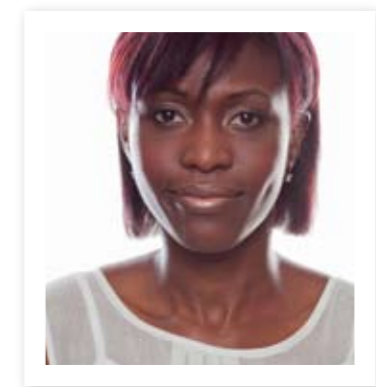
But when I began working five years ago, my lifestyle took a dramatic turn.

I work long hours and am constantly on the move, skipping meals or eating on the run. My stressful lifestyle has caused me to develop an ulcer and I've had to start taking medication. I'd also been feeling constantly run down so a friend encouraged me to start taking a daily vitamin boost.

I have to admit, though, that I don't take my pills religiously. There are days I forget and others when I'm just lazy. I'm still not 100 per cent comfortable with filling my body with vitamins and boosters. I believe that pills - whether they're supplements or medication - are somehow making us more susceptible to illnesses. Could they be making us "soft"?

I am often surprised to learn how many of my friends take pills. It has most definitely become a trend and a status

**'I believe pills are making us more susceptible to illnesses'**



symbol - my friends often drop into conversation what supplements they take. I won't conform to peer pressure, though: I would like to have the lifestyle I had growing up - eating the right foods, exercising and getting enough sleep. For me, that is the secret to a healthy life.' **mc**

HAIR AND MAKE-UP: COLLEEN PAION/MONOPOLE