



Consumer Survey: AI Trust and Usage in Healthcare Search

Understanding AI's influence
on patient decision-making

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Background

For many marketers, AI started as something we mainly talked about at work. We saw it hurtling toward us from light-years away and wondered when our friends and neighbors would notice that thing in the sky.

Well, it's finally caught up and settled into public orbit. Consumers interact with AI every day. It's no longer emerging — it's mainstream.

While some patients take advice from Dr. Chat and others can't scroll quickly enough past the "AI slop," one thing is universal: **Everyone's encountering AI on search engines.**

This makes AI an integral part of today's patient journeys. To keep engaging our audiences, we need to understand how it affects patient decision-making.

In August 2025, Aha Media Group and Klein & Partners surveyed 1,000 U.S. healthcare consumers about AI perceptions and search behavior. We asked people how they feel about AI and how they respond to AI-generated answers. Do they:

- Read them?
- Trust them?
- Use them to make healthcare decisions?

Our online survey included 23 questions: 22 multiple-choice and 1 open-ended.

This report offers insights to inform your search, website, and multichannel marketing strategies in an AI-driven information market. If you're looking for data to drive your AI search approach, this is for you.

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Part I

AI awareness and understanding

Do consumers know when they're looking at an AI search result? Nearly 3 out of 4 people say yes. **73% of survey participants report knowing that Google's top results are often AI-generated.**

This means 1 in 4 searchers may not realize they're reading an AI-generated answer. Healthcare providers must be prepared to educate patients who quote AI output.

But while most consumers know AI is there, many aren't quite sure how it works. When asked how Google selects sources for its AI Overview:

- 41% believe AI chooses results based on content quality — which is Google's intent.
- 22% mistakenly assume those results are paid or sponsored.
- 37% aren't sure.

Younger audiences are more confident in their understanding and more likely to see inclusion in AI results as a signal of quality. Boomers, by contrast, are the least certain about how AI Overview chooses sources.



1 in 4 searchers may not realize they're reading an AI-generated answer.

Perceptions of Google's AI Overview sources	Female	Male	Gen Z	Millennials	Gen X	Boomers
AI is picking them on content quality they are not paid/sponsored results	38%	43%	59%	47%	35%	27%
Those are paid/sponsored results	16%	29%	17%	30%	24%	16%
Not sure	46%	28%	25%	22%	41%	57%

Strategic takeaway

Pair AI visibility tactics with trust-building measures, like validating that a clinician has reviewed your content.

Part II

Public perceptions of AI

Public opinion on AI is evenly split. We asked participants how they feel about getting an AI-generated answer for a healthcare query.

The data shows a fragmented landscape.

Audiences fall into **3 mindsets**:

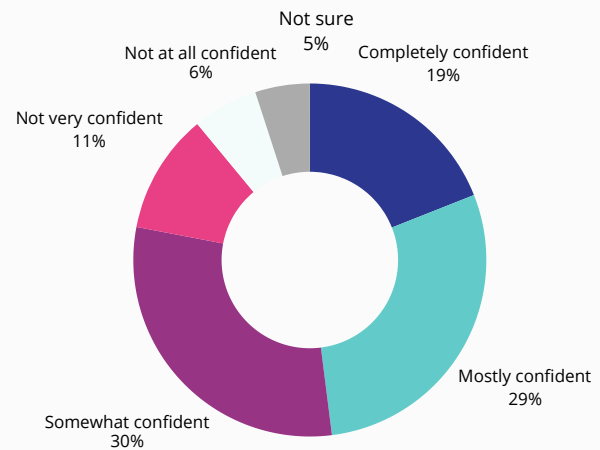
- 34% of respondents are skeptical or negative toward AI.
- 34% are positive and open, but cautious.
- 32% (those remaining) are indifferent or unsure.

Skeptics shared concerns about mistakes and security, especially in healthcare searches.

Optimists cited convenience and efficiency as reasons for using AI, while some noted they still prefer human verification.

Despite the split, **78% of people say they're at least somewhat confident in the credibility of AI Overview answers**. Only 6% of people are "not at all confident" — showing that many skeptics still have some level of trust in AI.

Confidence that Google's AI Overview answers have credible sources



Finally, we asked respondents to rate their trust in the information provided by Google's AI Overview. On average, trust in AI Overview is **6.7 out of 10**. Men, younger adults, and higher-income consumers generally report higher trust.

Trust in AI is clearly conditional. To reach all consumers, marketers must design for 3 audiences at once:

1. **Skeptics** who want human reassurance
2. **Pragmatists** who use AI but verify
3. **Neutrals** who simply want convenience

Strategic takeaway

The opportunity lies in balancing convenient, AI-enabled pathways with a human touch.

Part III

The data on consumer AI usage

What do people use to search for health information? We found:

- 76%: Traditional Google search
- 35%: ChatGPT
- 32%: Google's AI Mode
- 25%: Gemini
- 17%: Copilot
- 9%: Perplexity
- 9%: Claude

While ChatGPT appears to be the dominant AI chatbot, Google remains the most popular search platform. This aligns with several studies showing Google's loss in search market share to AI is still minimal.

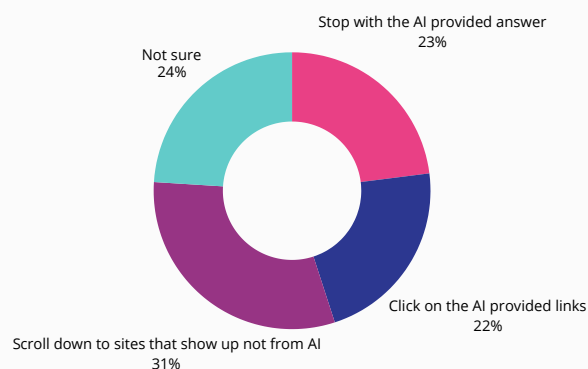
Zero-click behavior is on the rise — this won't surprise those who saw click-throughs decline in 2025. When presented with an answer for a health-related search, **nearly 1 in 4 consumers (23%) stop at the AI-generated response** without scrolling further.

Younger audiences seem to be more comfortable trusting AI answers, while older users are still inclined to validate information through organic results or by clicking through to AI sources.



Nearly 1 in 4 consumers stop at the AI-generated response

When you get a result from your health-related search, do you typically...



Note: Zero-click search declines with age while uncertainty increases with age.

Something that did surprise us? Consumers don't often remember the brands that AI cites — even immediately after viewing them.

After a few seconds of looking at an AI-generated result for a healthcare query, we asked participants to name the brands or hospitals they noticed. We found:

- **76% couldn't recall any hospitals or health brands that were cited.**
- No single health system was recalled by more than 3% of respondents.
- Mayo Clinic, Cleveland Clinic, and Johns Hopkins were falsely recalled 2%-3% of the time, despite never appearing in the search results.

In short, being cited by AI doesn't automatically boost brand awareness. **Ensure your organization looks and sounds consistent across every channel to improve recognition.**

Part IV

AI's influence on decision-making

So far, the data has shown:

- Most consumers don't know how AI selects sources.
- Trust in AI is moderate overall.
- While 23% of respondents stop searching after viewing the AI-provided answer, most continue their research.

These signs point to a limited understanding of AI and lack of trust in its credibility. But what matters most in this conversation isn't what consumers think or say — it's what they do.

And despite all the doubt, audiences are acting on AI-generated information. 38% of people say they've made a healthcare decision based on an AI answer.

AI's influence compounds when it cites a brand people recognize. When asked how they'd react to seeing a familiar brand cited:

- 43% would visit the brand's website to learn more.
- 27% would trust their content that showed up in the AI Overview.
- 24% would look into the brand to see about becoming a patient in the future.
- 16% would remember the brand for later.

People are acting on the information they read in AI Overviews and chatbots. It's guiding them through the funnel for brands they know — and maybe even brands they don't.



About 2 out of 5 members of your audience have acted on health information or sought care from brands cited in AI.

Strategic takeaway

Don't stall on structuring and optimizing your content for AI. Citations are making an impact, even if you aren't seeing or measuring it yet.

Conclusion

The conversation around AI and search to date has largely been about visibility: clawing back to the top of search engines that keep pushing organic results further down.

But this survey showed us that most consumers don't notice or remember who lands in citations. AI search success isn't, in fact, measured by visibility, brand awareness, or recognition.

It's about conversion: making the most of this new medium, recognizing its place in today's patient journey, and supplementing AI-driven pathways with the reassurance that consumers need.

Not everyone landing on a website — or entering a waiting room — will be confident they're in the right place. **It's up to healthcare organizations to fill the trust gap.** Offer human-centric elements that say, "You can trust us," and people will.

AI's role in healthcare search shouldn't be underestimated. But don't stress over this new digital ballgame. You don't need to learn the rules alone.

Read about the strategies we're advising clients on, in light of our findings (it's not just another GEO blog):

[Explore data-driven strategies](#)

About Aha Media Group

Aha Media Group is an expert digital marketing agency that exclusively serves healthcare. Partnering with 200+ healthcare organizations across 2 decades of business, we deliver strategies and content that connect patients to the health information and care they need.

While our industry has transformed in recent years, it's just the start. As technology, algorithms, and consumer preferences continue to shift, count on us to share what we learn with our clients and the healthcare marketing community in real time.

Get in touch

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Addendum: Research participants

Survey participants comprised a national random sample of 1,000 adult healthcare decision-makers.

