
Statistics on pharmaceuticals 2023

In 2023, women retrieved more prescribed medication than men. Antidepressant prescription was higher for elderly people compared to younger people and higher in women compared to men. However, the increase in antidepressant prescription was highest among children and teenagers. More than 80 percent of those aged 75 and over were prescribed with medication for high blood pressure. For the same age group, the prescription of sleeping pills and sedatives continued to decline.

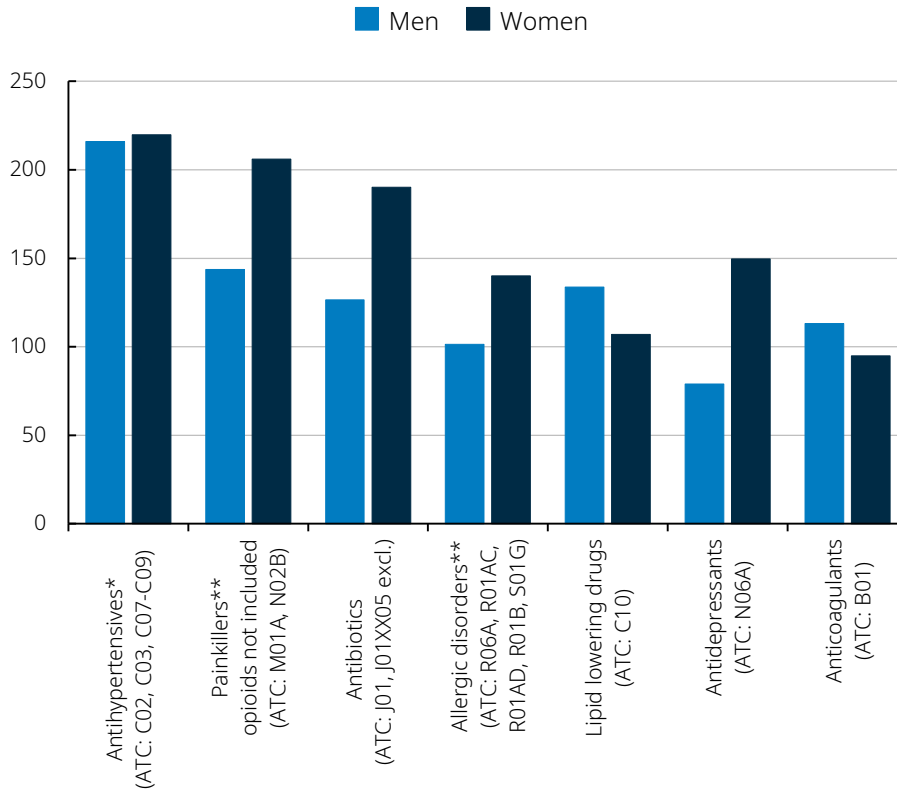
Women are retrieving more prescribed medication than men

In 2023, 67 percent of Sweden's population retrieved at least one prescription drug. For women, the proportion was 75 percent, including contraceptives. The corresponding figure for men was 60 percent. Antihypertensive drugs were the group of medicines prescribed to the largest number of patients. In the same year, almost 2.3 million patients collected this type of medicine from pharmacies, which corresponds to 22 percent of the population. The next most common drug groups were painkillers, antibiotics, drugs treating allergic disorders, blood lipid lowering agents, antidepressants, and anticoagulants.

Women retrieved more medications in all drug groups than men except for lipid lowering drugs and anticoagulants, which were retrieved by more men. The gender difference was greatest for antidepressants, which were prescribed to 15 percent of women compared to 8 percent of men. The gender difference was also high for painkillers and antibiotics. In 2023, 21 percent of women and 14 percent of men retrieved at least one prescription for painkillers, while the corresponding figures for antibiotics were 19 percent among women and 13 percent among men. The use of antibiotics increased slightly for both genders, but remains lower compared to the years before the pandemic.

Figure 1. The seven most common drug groups in 2023, by gender

Number of patients per 1000 inhabitants



* Excluding C02AC02 and C07AA07 ** The group contains certain medicines that can also be bought without a prescription

Source: The National Prescribed Drug Register, National Board of Health and Welfare

About the statistics

The statistics show the number of people that have retrieved the pharmaceutical in question at least once during one year from a pharmacy. It does not include pharmaceuticals without prescription nor those distributed by institutions with their own pharmaceutical stocks such as hospitals. Some drug groups also include pharmaceuticals that are also available over the counter.

Antidepressants is increasing most among young people

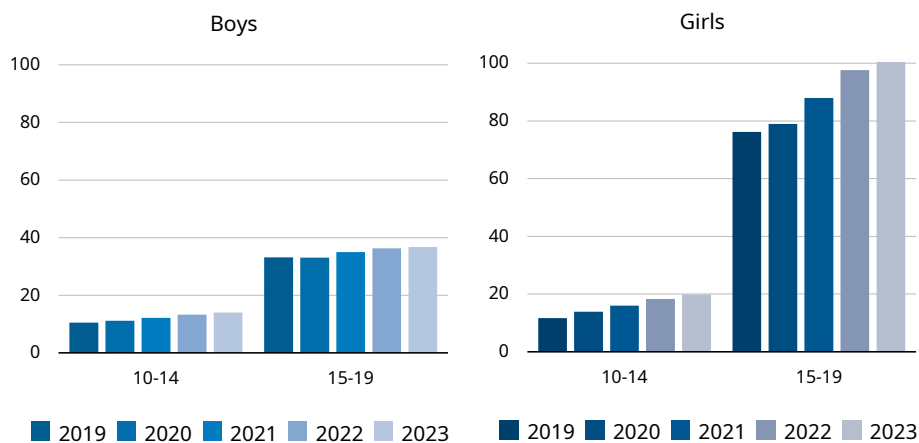
The prescription of antidepressants has increased every year for the last 15 years. A total of 1.2 million patients retrieved antidepressants in 2023, corresponding to just over 11 percent of the population. Antidepressant use was highest in people aged 75 and over, with 23 percent retrieving this type of medication. However, over the past five years, the largest increase in

antidepressant use was among children and young people. The proportion of girls aged 10-14 who were prescribed an antidepressant increased from 1.2 percent in 2019 to 2.0 percent in 2023. For boys of the same age, the corresponding increase was from 1.0 percent in 2019 to 1.4 percent in 2023.

Among teenagers aged 15-19, the difference between girls and boys was even greater. Girls in this age group were almost three times more likely to be prescribed antidepressants in 2023 than boys in the same age group. The proportion of girls in this age group retrieving antidepressants was 10.2 percent, compared to 3.7 percent among boys. Antidepressants are used to treat both depression and anxiety. In parallel with the increase in the prescription of antidepressants, there has been an increase in the diagnosis of depression and anxiety disorders among children and young people¹.

Figure 2. Antidepressants among children and young people 2019-2023, by gender.

Number of patients per 1000 inhabitants



Source: The National Prescribed Drug Register, National Board of Health and Welfare

Antihypertensive drugs are most common among the elderly

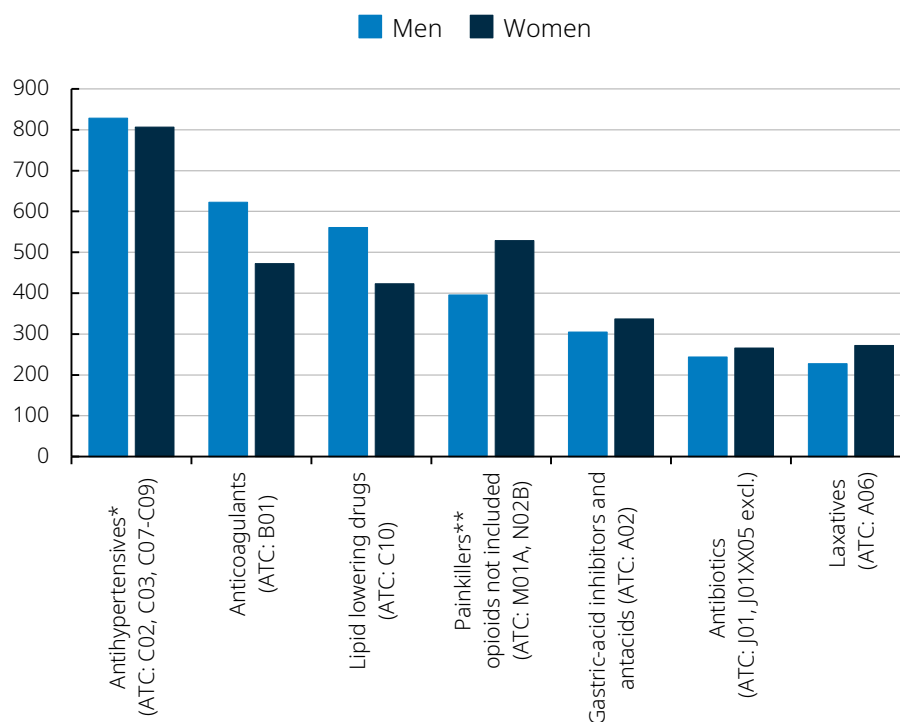
More than 80 percent of people aged 75 and over were prescribed antihypertensive drugs in 2023. The next most common groups of medicines among older people were anticoagulants, blood lipid lowering agents, painkillers, gastric-acid inhibitors and antacids, antibiotics, and laxatives. Among these groups, the gender difference was greatest for anticoagulants, which were prescribed to 62 percent of men compared to 47 percent of women. The gender difference was also large for painkillers, but in the

¹ Aspekter av antidepressiv läkemedelsbehandling av barn och unga vuxna. National Board of Health and Welfare, April 2021.

opposite direction: 53 percent of women compared to 40 percent of men received this type of medicine.

Figure 3. The seven most common drug groups among people aged 75 and over in 2023, by gender.

Number of patients per 1000 inhabitants



* Excluding C02AC02 and C07AA07 ** The group contains certain medicines that can also be bought without a prescription

Source: The National Prescribed Drug Register, National Board of Health and Welfare.

The prescription of sleeping pills and sedatives is decreasing among elderly

The prescription of sleeping pills and sedatives in the age group 75 years and over has decreased every year since 2013, with an overall decrease of 24 percent. The gender difference has been large and stable during this period. 26 percent of women and 17 percent of men retrieved these types of medicines at least once in 2023. One of the reasons for the decrease in sleeping pills may be a greater caution in the prescription of benzodiazepines and benzodiazepine-related medicines, which are the most common substances in this group of medicines^{2,3}. Another potential

² Indikatorer för god läkemedelsterapi hos äldre. National Board of Health and Welfare, June 2017.

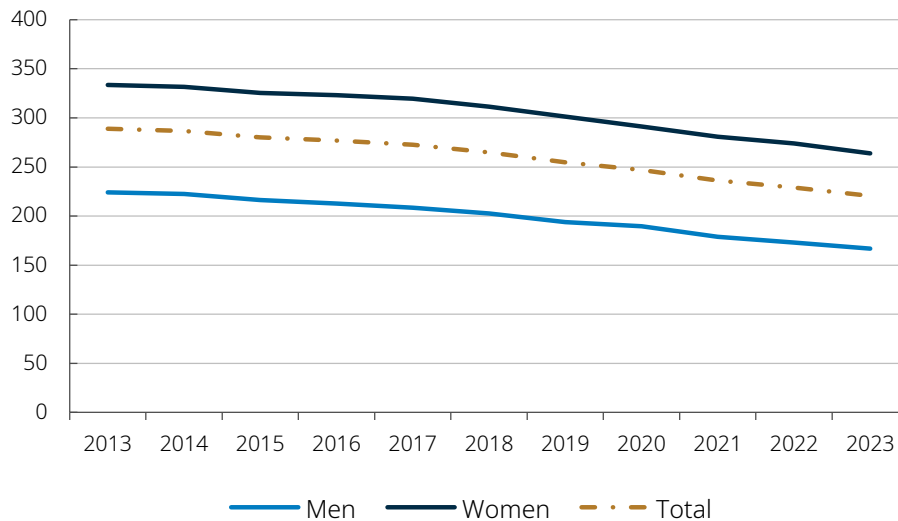
³ Kloka Listan. Äldre och läkemedel [Internet]. Stockholm; 2024 [19 January 2024; 19 march 2024]. Available by <https://klokalistan.se/terapiomrade/aldre-och-lakemedel.html>. About Kloka Listan (the Wise List) here:

<https://janusinfo.se/inenglish/thewiselist2015inenglish.4.2baa5e3e161e6f22189240.html>

explanation is the increased use of antidepressants for sleep disorders among older people in recent years⁴.

Figure 4. Sleeping pills and sedatives among people aged 75 and over in 2023, by gender.

Number of patients per 1000 inhabitants



Source: The National Prescribed Drug Register, National Board of Health and Welfare.

More information

You can find more tables, graphs and information here (select Tillhörande dokument och bilagor): www.socialstyrelsen.se/statistik-och-data/statistik/alla-statistikamnen/lakemedel (in Swedish, but with English list of terms). If you want to use our statistical database: www.socialstyrelsen.se/en/statistics-and-data/statistics/statistical-databases

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⁴ Kartläggning och analys av förskrivningen av antidepressiva läkemedel till personer 65 år och äldre. National Board of Health and Welfare, 2023.