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Healthcare Archetypes

These eight user archetypes come from Fathom Consulting's ongoing research into how people make healthcare decisions. Each one describes a distinct mindset: how that person approaches their care, what they do for their health and what gets in their way.

The archetypes are built from what people told us about their attitudes and habits, so two people of the same age and background can land in very different archetypes. We'll use them to keep a range of real perspectives for our team and treat the barriers on each page as starting points for new ideas.

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But what about people like me?

My mindset

I know that a person's unique situation and their individual intersection of demographics has a huge impact on what health care tests and treatments are right for them. A doctor can't possibly treat me if they don't even know me.

My approach to care

Proactive — Reactive

Trusting — Skeptical

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How I think about healthcare decisions

- Evaluate if the advice I am receiving applies to me
- Reject recommendations that feel like boilerplate or based only on age and gender
- Continue working with providers who have known me a long time
- Look for things to get me back to my personal baseline, not an abstract "healthy range"

What I do for my health

- Look for providers who have experience with my specific demographics or condition
- Ask my provider to pay attention to me as an individual
- Use AI to help me put the pieces together or filter advice based on my personal situation, then I may take this to my provider
- Track my health to show how it has changed from my personal baseline
- Find people similar to me demographically or health wise for motivation, connection, and practical tips

What makes it hard or impossible

- Dismissive providers
- Lack of providers with adequate experience

May correlate with:

Health Literate | Underserved Demographic | Chronic Illness | Episodic Illness | Gradual Health Change



Fearing what the future holds

My mindset

I have to do everything I can to stay as healthy as I can; I've known someone whose health deteriorated quickly and it scares me. The healthcare system seems like it wants me to accept "good enough" and stop trying.

My approach to care

Proactive — Reactive

Trusting — Skeptical

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How I think about healthcare decisions

- Research online or with AI to find the optimal regimen or solution and suggest it to the doctor
- Reject recommendations that ask me to settle for less than I want
- Justify spending time and resources since poor health is a real possibility and it would change everything for the worse
- Have to keep questioning and trying new avenues; don't accept "good enough" as an answer

What I do for my health

- Closely track and monitor what I'm doing and how I'm feeling using the best tech available
- Find and follow people who care for their health like I do to get tips, information, and motivation
- Order high-quality supplements and products
- Travel to other countries for healthcare I can't get in the US

What makes it hard or impossible

- I have to verify everything myself and it feels like a second job
- I can't get what I want through the traditional healthcare system
- Healthcare professionals don't believe what I'm say or bring to my visits
- The treatments I want aren't covered, I may need to pay out of pocket

May correlate with:

Health Literate | Tech Savvy | Chronic Illness | Gradual Health Change



Feeling better can wait

My mindset

I know I have some things my doctor or loved ones think I could do to feel better, but I can't really prioritize that at the moment. Taking more time or spending more money on tests or procedures just doesn't feel possible.

My approach to care

Proactive — Reactive

Trusting — Skeptical

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How I think about healthcare decisions

- Weigh how urgent something is based on how I am feeling today
- Have a loose plan for when I will address an issue
- Wait for barriers to be low enough or my symptoms to be bothersome enough to take the next step
- Question who benefits from me taking the next step
- Doubt I would do anything with the results or if the treatment will work

What I do for my health

- Try to do the basics to feel my best (walk, sleep, avoid stress)
- Treat symptoms if they bother me enough
- Accept my health situation but try to gain financial stability or work out a budget so I can eventually get more care

What makes it hard or impossible

- I have a specific ceiling for what I can / will spend
- I have a threshold in mind where care feels in reach (distance, time, scheduling)
- Need to care for others instead of myself

May correlate with:

Health Inexperience | Financial Insecurity | Episodic Illness | Gradual Health Change



Getting by just fine

My mindset

My health is handled. I have someone I trust, I go when I'm told to go, and it's been fine for years. I'm not going to spend a bunch of energy or money on this beyond what I actually need to. I have other things in my life that have more of my attention.

My approach to care

Proactive — Reactive

Trusting — Skeptical

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How I think about healthcare decisions

- Assume there's usually an answer my provider knows and tells me
- Health isn't that big of a deal in my life - "I don't really think about it"
- Trust that if something needed attention someone would tell me
- Disregard information that challenges my view of myself as a pretty healthy individual or goes against the advice of my doctor
- Judge a result against my last result (things are fine if roughly the same)
- Treat one bad number as a one-off unless it keeps repeating

What I do for my health

- Use the portal for questions, refills, and scheduling; the easier, the better
- Keep doing the same habits I've been doing
- Engage with wellness programs when my employer or system puts them in front of me and the barrier to starting is low
- Note something only if it looks like it becomes a pattern

What makes it hard or impossible

- Effort / anything that requires me to look for it
- Won't seek a second opinion or escalate on my own

May correlate with:

Managed Condition | Long-term Provider | Tech Savvy



Finding the root cause

My mindset

I don't want to just treat my symptoms, I want to find out what's making me sick so we can address it at the source. Some providers seem like they just want to prescribe something and get you out of the office quickly. I'm looking for something or someone to help me investigate and unravel what is really going on.

My approach to care

Proactive — Reactive

Trusting — Skeptical

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How I think about healthcare decisions

- Assume I will need tests and to see specialists to find out what's going on
- Reject recommendations that only address symptoms, including medications
- Justify spending time and resources on getting an answer because it avoids a lifetime treating symptoms
- This quest is my life now; I can't stop until I figure it out; providers are either with me or against me

What I do for my health

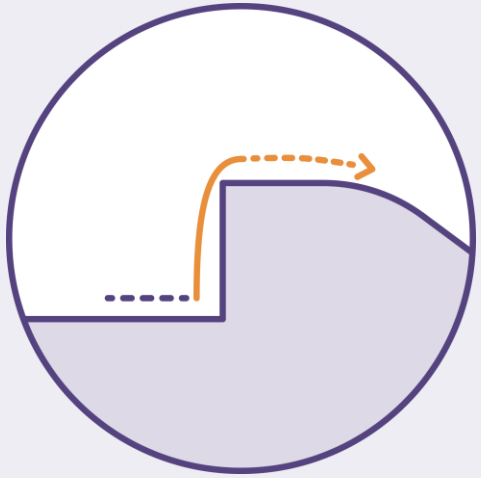
- Research to find underlying causes of different symptoms and ask doctor about them
- Use AI to surface correlations, patterns, or connections between symptoms, lab results, demographics, and cutting-edge science
- Find and follow people who have discovered the cause of their health challenges for tips and hope
- Order my own diagnostic tests and schedule with specialists in my community or virtually

What makes it hard or impossible

- Triage / urgent care mindset addresses presenting symptoms only
- Barriers to seeing specialists (referrals, availability, geography)
- I am laser-focused on an answer, but it may not actually help me feel better

May correlate with:

Health Literate | Episodic Illness | Chronic Illness | Sudden Health Change



Facing a new reality

My mindset

I feel like my life has been completely changed by something I never saw coming. I want to get back to where I was before all this happened, so I try to understand everything and follow every recommendation I can find.

My approach to care

Proactive — Reactive

Trusting — Skeptical

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How I think about healthcare decisions

- Place myself in the hands of the care team; I don't even know what to question
- Over time I crave more and more information and want to know what I can do to feel better
- I keep engaging, even though I'm exhausted, because I'm in a battle now
- I reject advice that forces me to settle for less than I believe is possible

What I do for my health

- Google what my test results mean or what a procedure is going to be like
- Reach out to people facing a similar diagnosis or health event for connection
- Lean on family and friends for support and advice; I need them to help keep me going
- Look for low-barrier ways to engage like telehealth visits, home bloodwork, nurse lines, providers in my system or near my home

What makes it hard or impossible

- Exhaustion and overwhelm
- Depletion of financial resources
- Going from supporter to someone needing support

May correlate with:

Health Inexperience | Financial Insecurity | Episodic Illness | Sudden Health Change



Preparing to interact

My mindset

To make the most of my time with providers, I need to go in already knowing a lot about the things I want to talk about. Having smart questions and being able to follow the conversation means I will get the best care possible.

My approach to care

Proactive — Reactive

Trusting — Skeptical

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How I think about healthcare decisions

- Providers will dismiss my concerns or talk over my head if I'm not ready
- Engaging with the healthcare system is rare and expensive, I need to make the most of it
- My health is my responsibility, so I need to take charge of it

What I do for my health

- Research to find out what I should be concerned about or asking about
- Use AI to draft questions or areas of interest based on my health and age / gender
- Review what was ordered and discussed at prior visits using the portal or my own notes app
- Get tests done prior to my time with a provider so we can discuss the results
- Create summaries for new providers to get them up-to-speed on what ground has already been covered

What makes it hard or impossible

- Wants to fit a lot into one visit
- May not come back if concerns and questions not handled well

May correlate with:

Health Literate | Financial Insecurity | Tech Savvy | Episodic Illness | Gradual Health Change



Keeping everyone else going

My mindset

I'm the one who notices when something is off, looks it up, makes the appointment, and follows through for people in my life who wouldn't otherwise. If I don't catch it, nobody else will. I have to stay well enough to keep doing this and that's why my health matters, but it's usually last.

My approach to care

Proactive — Reactive

Trusting — Skeptical

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How I think about healthcare decisions

- If there's a flag from a provider, it will probably go nowhere unless I do something about it
- Weigh every decision against the costs to my household in time and money
- Prepare in advance for things that haven't happened yet
- Justify my care by what it lets me do for everyone else

What I do for my health

- Research and prepare questions before appointments
- Use AI to turn what a provider said into questions I can ask that I might not think of
- Adjust habits to accommodate the health of the people in my household - child, spouse/partner, parent(s)
- Track for others as much as I track for myself

What makes it hard or impossible

- My own care is last
- Becoming the person who needs support vs. giving it

May correlate with:

Health Literate

Multigenerational Household

Tech Savvy



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