

Health literacy is the degree to which individuals have the capacity to obtain, process, and understand basic health information and services needed to make appropriate health decisions. (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. 2000. *Healthy People 2010*.)

People 65 and older make nearly twice as many physician office visits per year than adults 45 to 65. However, an estimated two-thirds of older people are unable to understand the information given to them about their prescription medications. Over two thirds of adults over 60 have difficulty using print materials, forms or performing calculations.

It is important to improve health communication as a way to improve the health of older adults.

Individuals with low health literacy may have difficulty:

- Locating providers and services
- Filling out complex health forms
- Sharing their medical history with providers
- Seeking preventive health care
- Knowing the connection between risky behaviors and health
- Managing chronic health conditions
- Understanding directions on medicine

How you can help:

- Identify patients with limited literacy levels.
- Use simple language, short sentences and define technical terms.
- Supplement instruction with appropriate materials (videos, models, pictures, etc.).
- Ask patients to explain your instructions (teach back method) or demonstrate the procedure.
- Ask questions that begin with “how” and “what,” rather than closed-ended yes/no questions.
- Organize information so that the most important points stand out and repeat this information.
- Reflect the age, cultural, ethnic and racial diversity of patients.
- For Limited English Proficiency (LEP) patients, provide information in their primary language.
- Improve the physical environment by using lots of universal symbols.
- Offer assistance with completing forms.

(From: Health Resources and Services Administration <http://www.hrsa.gov/publichealth/healthliteracy/>)

Health Literacy Educational Content for Healthcare Providers

<http://healthlit.fcm.arizona.edu/>

Health Literacy Module from the University of Arizona Center on Aging.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RacWKCVo8VM>

50 min webinar on health literacy concepts, data, and great examples of how to improve written teaching tools.

<http://www.nursingworld.org/MainMenuCategories/ANAMarketplace/ANAPeriodicals/OJIN/TableofContents/Vol142009/No3Sept09/Health-Literacy-in-Older-Adults.html>

On-line article that covers aging and learning, with tips on how to modify patient education.

Health Literacy Content for Providers on Medication Management

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7QIN2nU8B_k

6 min video describes the difficulty using a medication cup for liquid medications.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BgTuD7I7LG8>

4 min video gives graphic examples of patient's difficulty with medication labels, medical jargon, and forms. Helps illustrate that teaching methods used by healthcare professionals may confuse patients.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cGtTZ_vxjyA

24 min video that covers some of the video examples above and gives tips on how to improve patient's understanding of their health problem and how to take medications. Aimed at physician office visits, but the tips can be used in any healthcare setting.

<http://bemedsmart.org/coalition/>

Meetings and resources from the BeMedSmart Coalition in Pima County, AZ.

Patient/Caregiver Resources on Medication Management

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l7kYAcxwXVk>

3.5 min video for patients on how to ensure patient's multiple doctors know what their medications are.

<http://www.ahrq.gov/patients-consumers/diagnosis-treatment/treatments/pillcard/index.html>

Tool to create a pill card for a patient- could be used by healthcare provider, patient/family, and caregiver.

<http://www.mustforseniors.org/index.jsp>

This education program is for pts, caregivers, and professionals. It has PowerPoint slides which can be used for classes of seniors, etc. There are a variety of articles, facts sheets, and tips on medication use. MUST stands for Medication Use Safety Trainning for Seniors.