

Improving Health Literacy

Health Literacy

- Capacity to obtain, process, and understand basic health information and services needed to make appropriate health decisions.
- Must have basic literacy skills.
- Health literacy involves:
 - Interpreting labels / taking medication correctly
 - Analyzing risks and benefits
 - Calculating dosages
 - Locating health information

Health Literacy Contributions¹

- Leads to understanding condition and optimal management.
- Lower Health literacy is linked to decreased preventative care, higher risk of death, more emergency room visits and hospitalizations.
- The Older Adult is one of the most vulnerable populations impacted by limited health literacy

Health Literacy Resources

- NIH Senior Health Page:
 - <https://nihseniorhealth.gov/>
- Health Literacy Special Collection:
 - <http://healthliteracy.worlded.org/index.htm>
- American Medical Association, health literacy page:
<http://www.ama-assn.org/ama/pub/about-ama/ama-foundation/our-programs/public-health/health-literacy-program.page?>
 - Toolkits and information on health literacy

Health Literacy Clues⁴

- You can't tell by just looking
- They won't tell you!
- Red flag behaviors that indicate limited literacy:
 - Patient forms incomplete or inadequately completed
 - Stating, "I forgot my glasses, can you read this to me?"
 - Unable to state medications they are on and why

Health Literacy Tips^{1,4}

- Use short words and sentences in handouts – Keep it simple
- Review instructions/handouts with patients
- Use pictures
- Slow down and use plain language
- Encourage questions or use "teach back" technique

References

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