

Health Literacy Basics

A Quick-Start Guide

“**Personal health literacy** is the degree to which individuals have the ability to find, understand, and use information and services to inform health-related decisions and actions for themselves and others.”

“**Organizational health literacy** is the degree to which organizations equitably enable individuals to find, understand, and use information and services to inform health-related decisions and actions for themselves and others.”

Making Health Information Easy to Understand

To support health literacy, we should use clear, simple language, make materials accurate and easy to read, and confirm understanding using tools like teach-back, where patients repeat information in their own words.

Organizations can help by communicating clearly, supporting shared decision-making, respecting cultural and linguistic needs, and offering resources that help people manage their health confidently. [1, 2, 3, 4, 5]

Best Practices

- **Use Plain Language:** Explain things in simple, clear words that everyone can understand.
- **Prioritize Information:** Share the most important points first so people don't get overwhelmed.
- **Include a Support Person:** Ask/offer to have a family member or friend join to help with communication and decision-making.
- **Use Preferred Language:** Make sure information is given in the language the person is most comfortable with.
- **Use Teach-Back to Confirm Understanding:** Ask the person to repeat the information in their own words so you can be sure it was explained clearly.
 - Consider using questions such as:
 - What is your main health concern?
 - What do you need to do next?
 - Why is it important for you to do this?
- **Address any barriers:** Consider any challenges experienced by navigation, access or learning.

References

[1] <https://www.healthliteracysolutions.org/iha-articles/introduction-to-health-literacy>
[2] <https://odphp.health.gov/our-work/national-health-initiatives/health-literacy/national-action-plan-improve-health-literacy>
[3] <https://psnet.ahrq.gov/primer/strategies-improve-organizational-health-literacy>
[4] <https://www.pfizer.com/products/medicine-safety/health-literacy>
[5] <https://www.nih.gov/institutes-nih/nih-office-director/office-communications-public-liaison/clear-communication/health-literacy>

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