

What is: *Health Literacy?*

Health information can be confusing for everyone. When given a new health diagnosis or instructions at a stressful time, you might find yourself feeling overwhelmed and unable to process what you're told. Many things, including your age, education, cultural background and communication skills may affect your level of "health literacy."



Why is health literacy important?

Health literacy is the ability to receive, understand and communicate basic health information and services.

Your health literacy impacts your ability to navigate the health care system:



Filling out complicated forms



Finding the right providers and services



Sharing important health information with your doctors



Making decisions about your care



Following instructions about your care

People with low health literacy may not have the skills they need to manage their health or remain healthy. They're also likely to have more hospitalizations and less likely to seek preventive care.

Approximately 9 out of 10 adults*

have difficulty using everyday health information.



*National Assessment of Adult Literacy

How to improve your health literacy

To improve your health literacy, you must be proactive. Start by working with a doctor who helps you understand the details of your care. In addition, the next time you visit the doctor, take the following steps:

STEP 1

Before your appointment, make a list of your symptoms, current medications (including vitamins and over-the-counter drugs), past surgeries and illnesses, and any questions or concerns you have, and share them with your doctor.

STEP 2

Don't be afraid to ask questions and repeat what you heard your doctor say. This can clear up any confusion on the spot. And let your doctor know if you're worried about being able to follow her instructions.

STEP 3

Ask for brochures, written instructions or websites for more information on any tests or medical conditions your doctor diagnoses or prescribes.

STEP 4

After your appointment, if you are confused or still have questions, call back and ask to speak with a nurse. Or, ask your pharmacist if you have a question about your medication.

Patients who are willing to talk with their doctors tend to be happier with their care.

5 benefits of health literacy

Having good health literacy can help you with:



CALCULATING

health care premiums, co-pays and deductibles



MEASURING

medications



UNDERSTANDING

BMI, cholesterol or blood sugar level readings



READING

nutrition labels



CREATING

a diet and exercise plan



Confused by health care lingo?

Check out UnitedHealth Group's Just Plain Clear Glossary to get the scoop on common health-related terminology: justplainclear.com



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