



THE
IMPORTANCE
OF **HEALTH**
LITERACY



WHAT IS HEALTH LITERACY?

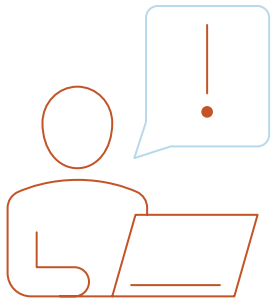
Health Literacy refers to an individual's ability to find, understand, and use information and services to inform decisions about their healthcare. A health-literate patient is one who can make well-informed choices about their health and can use health information as a tool.



WHY IS HEALTH LITERACY IMPORTANT?

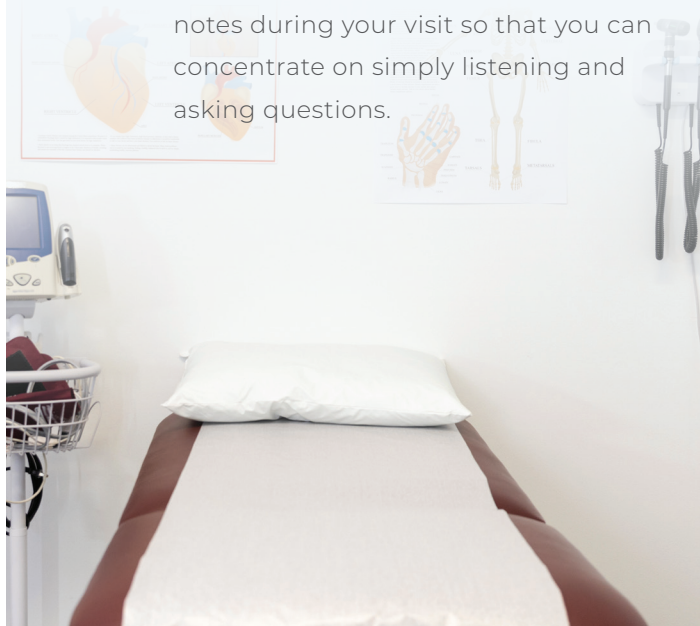
Having good health literacy skills allows patients to be in charge of their health care and advocate for themselves. Patients can communicate effectively with their clinicians and other healthcare professionals, and decide which providers, services and treatment plans best fit their needs. Strong

health literacy helps patients make decisions about their treatment and allows them to better analyze the benefits and risks associated with their healthcare plan.



HOW CAN I IMPROVE MY HEALTH LITERACY?

- > **Have a plan for your visit.** To maximize your time with your clinician, it is helpful for patients to come to their visit with an agenda. Prioritize what you want to learn and talk with your clinician about before you go.
- > **Ask questions.** If anything is unclear during your visit, always ask for clarity! Never be afraid to ask your clinician to explain something you don't understand. Your clinician is there to help you.
- > **Bring a friend or family member.** Having a friend or family member accompany you on your visit is a useful strategy. This person can take notes during your visit so that you can concentrate on simply listening and asking questions.



- > **Use the expertise of others.** For example, if you are receiving specialty care, your primary care provider can be a helpful resource. You can ask them to explain your test results or explain medical terminology you may be having difficulty grasping.
- > **Request an interpreter in advance.** If a language barrier exists between you and your clinician, asking for an interpreter in advance of your visit will help you understand everything clearly and make your visit run smoothly.
- > **Be a careful media consumer.** The wealth of health information available on TV, radio, websites and social media allows patients to access health resources quickly and easily. However, there is a risk that this information could be incomplete, conflicting, or inaccurate. For this reason, it is important that patients vet the sources and information that they find with their clinician before making any treatment decisions.



Provide feedback.

Patients may have opportunities to share their thoughts on how practices can improve their health literacy efforts. This could take the shape of a patient survey, online feedback prompts, or focus groups. Your voice plays a valuable part in helping practices better meet the needs of their patients. Take advantage of opportunities to share your thoughts.



HEALTH LITERACY RESOURCES

We've collected and published a few resources from agencies listed below that might be of help to you and you find them on our website.

- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS)
- Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion (OASH)
- U.S. National Library of Medicine (NLM)
- NLM's MedlinePlus
- The Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ)
- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)
- The Indian Health Service

SMARTER PATIENTS

One of the key ways healthcare consumers in our state can take a more active role in their overall care is by educating themselves on some of the important topics surrounding the current healthcare climate. The Board has created an educational series that covers a variety of subjects that patients might encounter.

Learn more at:

[ncmedboard.org/
smartpatients](https://ncmedboard.org/smartpatients)

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