

What is Health Literacy?

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.

- Healthy People 2010.



Literacy by the Numbers

- 9 out of 10 adults (**90%**) may not have the skills needed to manage their health and prevent problems.
- The average American adult reads at a **7th -8th** grade level. **1 out of 5** Americans (**20%**) reads at a **5th** grade level.

High risk populations

- The elderly
- Racial and ethnic minorities
- People with less than a high school degree
- People with low income levels
- Non-native speakers of English
- People with compromised health status



Why is it important?

- Low literacy has been linked to *poor* health outcomes such as *higher* rates of hospitalization, more ER visits and less frequent use of *preventive* services.
- These outcomes are associated with both *higher* healthcare costs and mortality.
- People with low health literacy *miss* more appointments, are more likely to be *non-compliant*, *poorer* historians and have more medication *errors*.

Who can improve Health Literacy?

- It is the responsibility of **all** healthcare workers, not just educators, to help improve health literacy. Education is an important part of our roles as healthcare professionals.
- Make *Health Literacy* part of your vocabulary and part of your practice. Learn the facts and help your patients: <https://health.gov/>

