

Clear communication is the best medicine.

Health information can be confusing.

Words about technology and treatment are not in everyday speech. Yet more than ever before, we are expected to help take care of ourselves.

A health care visit is worthless if you do not understand what is said and why.

Learning more about health literacy can help you make the most of every visit.

Health literacy is your ability to:

- Get information about your health from a health care provider (doctor, nurse, therapist or pharmacist).
- Understand what to do or how to use the information to stay healthy.
- Take your pills correctly or follow your health care plan at home.

Health literacy can be a problem at any education level. Just because you can read well does not mean that you can understand and act on health information.

Why is health literacy important?

Nearly half of American adults have trouble understanding information about their health or the medicine they take. Because they do not understand, they are more likely to:

- Get less preventive care.

- Be sick more often.
- Take medicine the wrong way or not at all.
- Use expensive emergency services.
- Be admitted to a hospital and stay longer.

These problems add billions of dollars to our country's health care expense. We share these costs in higher health care bills, insurance rates and taxes.

What can I do?

To be a partner in your care, come prepared to your appointment. Be ready to talk about your new symptoms or concerns. Have something to write on. Bring a friend or family member to take notes if you are not sure you will remember what you hear.

Ask three simple questions:

- **What is my main problem?**
- **What do I need to do?**
- **Why is it important for me to do this?**

You have a right to understand what you need to do for your health. Plain language is a challenge for health care providers. They are more comfortable using medical words. If you do not understand what is said, ask your health care provider to use plain language.

A free presentation has been developed to help you gain skill and confidence for more effective health care visits. *Health-e People Ask Questions* is available in several formats. Choose the one that suits you best.

1. See it on the Internet at www.literacycoalition.org/healthliteracy.html
If you do not have a computer, visit your public library or the library at your health care facility. Plan on about 20 minutes to watch the presentation.
 - Review as often as you like.
 - Practice what you learn.
 - Prepare for each health care visit.
2. Schedule a 30 to 60 minute presentation for your group or organization.
Call Great Rivers 2-1-1, a free information and referral service at one of these numbers:
2-1-1 or (800) 362-8255.
3. Attend a public presentation.
Call Great Rivers 2-1-1 or (800) 362-8255 or visit the Community Literacy Coalition website at www.literacycoalition.org/healthliteracy.html for a schedule.

Where can I get more health literacy information?

Throughout Wisconsin, Minnesota, and Iowa, resources are available to you.

- Call Great Rivers 2-1-1 any hour of the day or night. Dial 2-1-1 or (800) 362-8255.
- Visit the La Crosse Area Community Literacy Coalition website, www.literacycoalition.org
- Talk to a librarian in your community, local college or health care facility.

Librarians can show you Internet sources you can trust and understand.

Some good examples are:

- www.medlineplus.gov
- www.gundluth.org/libraries
- www.mayoclinic.com

If you would like to know more about literacy programs in your area, visit one of these websites:

- www.wisconsinliteracy.org
- www.themlc.org
- www.readiowa.org



Great Rivers Partners for Health-e People is a collaborative effort to increase awareness of health literacy. Its members are Gundersen Lutheran Health System, Franciscan Skemp/ Mayo Health System and the La Crosse Area Community Literacy Coalition.

These organizations are working together to raise awareness of problems related to health literacy.

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Ask Questions

- They are your key to good health.
- Why health literacy is important to you.

