

How do you know if your patients understand?

	The Approach	Suggestions/Examples
1	Ask patients to explain and/or demonstrate how they plan to take medication when they get home. Repeat as needed until the patient shows satisfactory understanding. (<i>This is the Teach Back or Show Me method.</i>)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “I want to make sure I explained everything clearly. Tell [or show] me how you will take your medication when you go home.” • “If you were trying to explain this information to your friend, what would you say?” • “Let’s review the main side effects of this new medicine. What are the two things I asked you to watch out for?”
2	Ask patients if they have questions in a way that makes them feel comfortable asking.	<p>“What questions do you have?” instead of “Do you have any questions?”</p> <p>Don’t ask: “Do you understand?”</p>

Health Literacy Indicators for a Comprehensive Medication Review

Health literacy refers to the ability to **UNDERSTAND** and **ACT ON** health information. While “red flags” are identified below, the best way to determine whether an individual would benefit from a Comprehensive Medication Review is by using the “Teach-Back” or “Show Me” technique with every patient. **Following the use of the Teach-Back Method, patients qualify for a Comprehensive Medication Review if they demonstrate one or more of the following barriers:**

Patient Expresses a Barrier to UNDERSTANDING Health Information:	Patient Expresses a Barrier to ACTING ON Health Information:
<p>Based on the pharmacist’s professional judgment, the patient does not understand crucial information related to his or her medication regimen following the use of Teach-Back.</p> <p>The following are events that may indicate the patient has barriers to UNDERSTANDING health information:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Patient cannot say what each of their medications is generally used for • Patient is familiar with personal medication(s) by color only/does not know the name of medication(s) he or she is taking • Patient cannot describe or demonstrate how each medication is taken (using the label as a prompt), including correct dosage and time of day • Patient expresses a “red flag” for low literacy, such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Incomplete forms ◦ Frequently missed appointments ◦ Delay tactics: “I forgot my glasses,” “I’ll read this later,” “I don’t have time to wait today,” “Let me bring this home so I can discuss it with my spouse” ◦ Reads a document upside down • Patient requires the use of a qualified interpreter or translator 	<p>Based on the pharmacist’s professional judgment, the patient does not know how to take his or her medication(s) correctly after Teach-Back has been implemented.</p> <p>The following are events that may indicate the patient has barriers to ACTING ON health information:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Patient is unable to demonstrate how and when to take prescribed medication(s) • Patient is unable to demonstrate pill counts • Patient has persistent adherence problems • Patient has not finished a complete round of prescribed medications at any time • Patient is currently outside of healthy range for indicators of the disease/condition for which patient is taking prescription medication • Patient has kept out of date or unused medications for possible future use • Patient takes medication(s) obtained from another country

Additional Resources

Wisconsin Health Literacy

Comprehensive information and resources on health literacy and services available through Wisconsin Health Literacy, links to pharmacy tools, health literacy screening information, plain language glossaries and more. For information, email: healthliteracy@wisconsinliteracy.org. www.WisconsinHealthLiteracy.org

Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ) Health Literacy Resources for Pharmacists

AHRQ has developed five health literacy tools for pharmacy and a set of curricular tools for pharmacy faculty.

Health Literacy Tools

- Pharmacy Health Literacy Assessment Tool & User’s Guide
- Training Program for Pharmacy Staff on Communication
- Guide on How To Create a Pill Card
- Telephone Reminder Tool to Help Refill Medicines On Time
- Explicit and Standardized Prescription Medicine Instructions

Curricular Modules for Faculty

Advancing Pharmacy Health Literacy Practices through Quality Improvement: Curricular Modules for Faculty

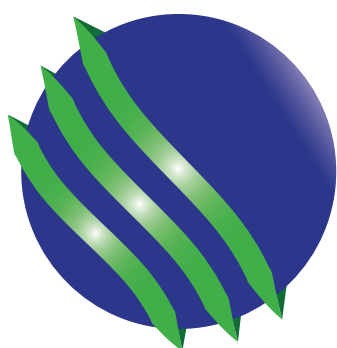
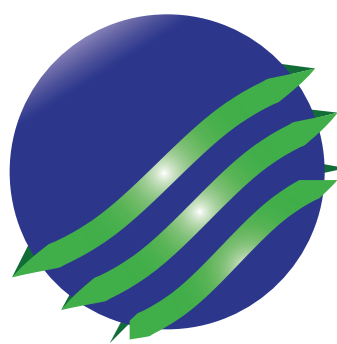
Available at AHRQ Pharmacy Health Literacy Center: <http://www.ahrq.gov/professionals/quality-patient-safety/pharmhealthlit/index.html>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

Free training about health literacy for public health professionals. CPE credits available for pharmacists. Available at <http://www.cdc.gov/healthliteracy/gettraining.html>

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

Quick Guide to Health Literacy: Available at <http://health.gov/communication/literacy/quickguide/>



Health Literacy Introduction

The tools and information in this pocket guide are provided to assist pharmacists in serving the needs of patients who have low health literacy. This information is not to be used as a substitute for professional training and judgment. Use of this information indicates acknowledgment that neither PSW nor its contributing authors will be responsible for any loss or injury, including death, sustained in connection with or as the result of using this information. When making judgments regarding specific medications, pharmacists should consult the complete information available in the product prescribing information or other published literature as appropriate. PSW is under no obligation to update information contained herein.

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What is Health Literacy

Health literacy involves making health information and services understandable for all. Skills include reading, writing, speaking, numeracy, listening and decision-making. A person's level of health literacy determines how well he or she can, for example:

- Read prescription labels
- Understand when and how to take medicine
- Understand informed consent documents
- Follow medical test instructions
- Understand what to do when discharged from the hospital
- Read health education materials
- Complete health insurance forms

Why is Health Literacy Important?

A direct link exists between low health literacy and:

- Negative health outcomes
- Poor health status
- Higher mortality
- Increased health care costs



Quote

“I take five different medicines. One I’m supposed to take three times a day and another is two pills twice a day. A different one I’m supposed to take when I have pain, and another one is every day for 10 days. The last one is 30 minutes after a meal daily. I can’t remember all that! So I just swallow them all in the morning to be sure I get them taken.”

*-Henry, 67,
participant in Wisconsin
Health Literacy Senior
Medication Workshop*

Who has low health literacy?

Nearly four of every ten adults have low health literacy—with skills below what they need to understand typical medication information. Groups especially likely to have low health literacy include:

- Adults age 65 and older
- Ethnic minorities
- Adults with limited English language skills
- Poor
- Homeless
- Prisoners
- Persons with limited education

Everyone has low health literacy at times. For example, it may be hard for a person to understand complicated instructions or health information when feeling sick, under stress or taking certain medications.

How can you tell if someone has low health literacy?

You can't tell by looking. People often feel ashamed and hide that they can't read or write well. Watch for these signs:

- Using excuses, such as “I forgot my glasses” or “I’ll read this when I get home”
- Copying what others do
- Lots of paper folded up in pocket or purse
- Lack of follow-through: incomplete forms, missed appointments
- Rarely ask questions
- Difficulty interpreting risk
- Ineffectively managing chronic health conditions

Medication use is a special challenge for those with low health literacy. They may have difficulty:

- Understanding when to take medications when directions are vague (“twice a day”)
- Understanding simple instructions, such as taking medications on an empty stomach
- Distinguishing one medication from another
- Understanding how medications work and potential side effects
- Interpreting medication warning labels
- Adhering to a medications regimen
- Accurately managing their own medication use, potentially resulting in adverse drug events

Can you screen for health literacy?

It's best to take the Universal Precautions approach. Assume all patients may have difficulty understanding. Simplify communication and confirm comprehension with every patient.

At times it may be helpful to verify if a patient has low health literacy so you can tailor a medication plan. In those situations, one question is a strong predictor of low health literacy: **“How confident are you filling out medical forms by yourself?”**

How can you evaluate your pharmacy's health literacy efforts?

1. Use the Pharmacy Health Literacy Assessment Tool developed by the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality. AHRQ.gov.
2. Contact Wisconsin Health Literacy to conduct an assessment. (608) 257-1655

How can you help low health literacy patients?

Below are some tested strategies that will help all patients—but especially those with low health literacy—gain the most benefit from their medications.

	Action	Suggestions/Examples
1	Use plain language.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “blood pressure pill,” not “anti-hypertensive” • “side effect,” not “adverse reaction” • “on skin,” not “topical”
2	Tell them only what they need to know, not what it is nice to know.	Limit to 3-5 key points
3	Use pictures and tools to reinforce learning.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Show pillbox or pill list sample • Draw a sketch
4	Slow down when you talk.	Watch for signs of confusion.
5	Listen for the patient's own terms and use them in the discussion.	Patients, for example, will likely use other words for “stool.”
6	Use analogies to help patients understand abstract concepts.	“The heart is like a pump.”
7	Use specific, concrete words to provide instructions.	“Take 1 hour before breakfast” rather than “take on empty stomach”
8	Provide easy-to-read and understand written materials.	Few messages, clear organization, short simple words, large type fonts, simple illustrations directly applicable to text

One of the best strategies to improve medication adherence with low health literacy patients is to conduct a Comprehensive Medication Review.