

# Introduction to Health Literacy

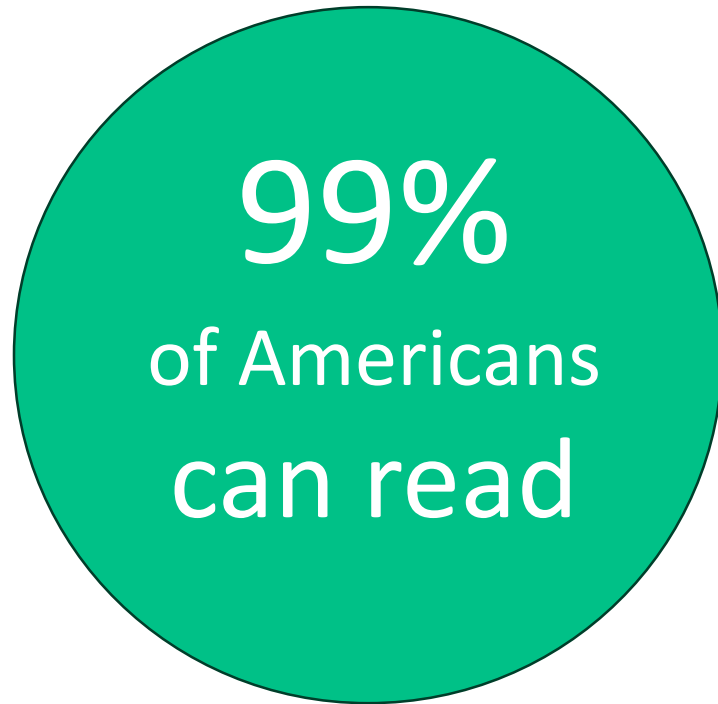
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**CRIHB**

The California Rural Indian Health Board, Inc.

# Health Literacy



BUT



# What is Oral Health Literacy?

The ability to read, understand, and act on oral health information to make appropriate oral health decisions



Keys to oral health literacy:

1. How to use the oral health care system
2. Basic oral health knowledge



# Based on Numerous Studies on Oral Health Literacy

- The General Public:

- Does not understand how to prevent dental caries.
- Does not know what fluoride is or what it does.
- Does not know what sealants are or what they are used for.

- Health Providers:

- Many, including dentists and dental hygienists, do not have a good understanding about how to prevent tooth decay.
- Most health care providers do not use recommended communication techniques.



- **The public and health care providers are largely unaware of the basic risk factors and prevention for many oral diseases:**
  - The fact that dental caries is both infectious and preventable
  - The relationship between good oral health and well-being



# The Importance of Oral Health Literacy

- ▶ Literacy skills are **a stronger predictor** of oral health status than age, income, employment status, education level, or racial/ethnic group.
- ▶ Nationally only 44% of adults with low health literacy skills had a dental visit in the previous year compared with 77% of those with proficient health literacy skills.
- ▶ Low oral health literacy is associated with increased caries severity and increased failed appointments/no shows.
- ▶ One in five American adults reads at a 5<sup>th</sup> grade level or below. The average American reads at the 8-9<sup>th</sup> grade level. Most health materials, however, are written above 10<sup>th</sup> grade level.



# Risks of Low Health Literacy

People with low health literacy:

- Are less able to care for their chronic conditions.
- Use more healthcare services to treat complications of disease.
- Are less likely to use preventive health services.
- Are more likely to engage in unsafe or inappropriate use of prescription or over-the-counter medications.
- Have higher mortality rates.



# Examples of Health Literacy:

- Knowing how to locate and navigate a health facility
- Reading, understanding, and completing many kinds of forms to receive treatment or deal with insurance
- Making appointments
- Articulating their own signs and symptoms
- Understanding the information you give
- Reading and following instructions
- Understanding medication bottles
- Knowing about different types of health professionals and what services they provide and how to access those services
- Ability to read and understand food labels
- Making health care decisions





# Oral Health Literacy and Early Childhood Caries (ECC)

## Knowledge Needed to Prevent ECC

- Importance of oral health
- Dental caries can be prevented.
- Fluorides prevent dental caries.
- The level of fluoride in their drinking water
- Most bottled water is fluoride deficient.
- When to use which fluorides
- When to take child to the dental office

## Skills Needed to Prevent ECC

- How to routinely clean the infant's/child's mouth
- How to recognize normal/abnormal teeth (decalcification)
- How to re-mineralize decalcified surfaces
- How to inspect the child's mouth
- How to administer fluoride properly
- How to limit the type and amount of sweets

# How Many Steps to Fulfill an Appointment?

3

- Call to make an appointment and navigate the phone system.
- Fill out necessary paperwork.
- Prepare for appointment: medication list, directions.

3

- Drive to the clinic.
- Follow the signs to the right clinic section.
- Check in at the front desk.

4

- Review of medical history and reason for visit
- Primary care and oral health exams
- Motivational interviewing and self-management goals

3

- Make treatment decisions.
- Check out at the front desk and make next appointment.
- Try to start new routine with the self-management goals.

=13 steps!



Overwhelmed?



So How Do You Know  
if Someone has Low  
Health Literacy?

**You Don't!**



# Health Literacy Universal Precautions

# Health Literacy Universal Precautions

Assume that all patients may have some difficulty understanding health information and accessing health services.

- Minimize the risk of miscommunication:
  - Simplify communication.
    - Know your audience!
  - Confirm comprehension.
- Make the office environment easier to navigate.
- Support patients' efforts to improve their health through patient engagement.





# Careless Communication



# Assessing Health Literacy

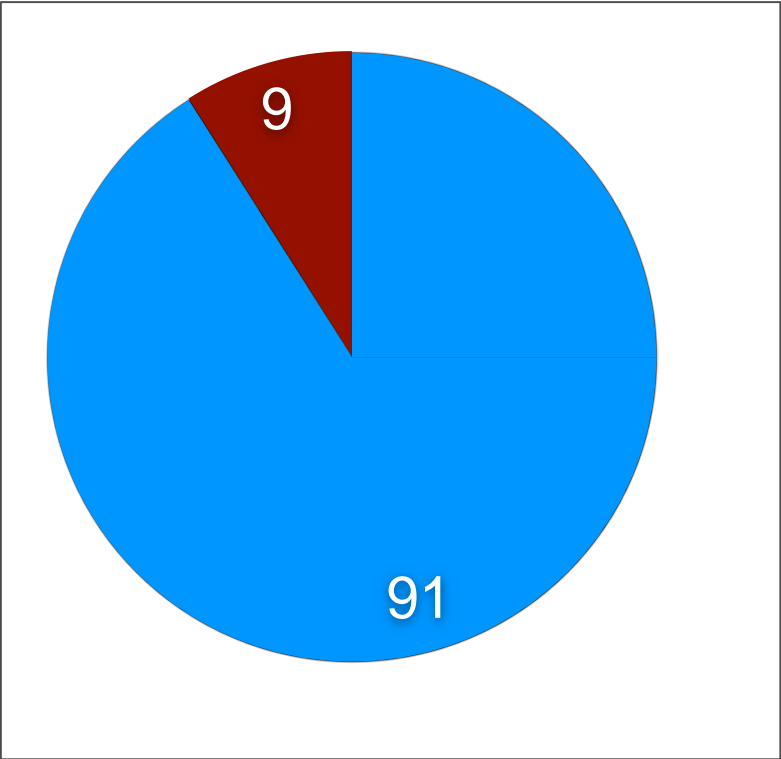
- **Rapid Estimate of Adult Literacy in Dentistry (REALD-30):** Requires patients to read and pronounce common dental terms. It has been used to assess health literacy among many different patient populations.
- **Brief Questionnaire:** 16 questions asking the patient's opinion on their ability to complete common health care tasks such as filling out forms and reading prescription labels
- **Newest Vital Sign (NVS):** Asks the patient to read and answer questions about ice cream food labels (calculations)
- **Test of Functional Health Literacy in Dentistry (TOFHiD):** Uses healthcare materials to screen numeracy and reading comprehension





# IHS Early Testing for Health Literacy

## REALM Test



- Adequate Health Literacy
- Low Health Literacy

Rapid Estimate of Adult Literacy in Medicine

REALM©

Terry Davis, PhD, Michael Crouch, MD, Sandy Long, PhD

Patient Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date of Birth \_\_\_\_\_ Grade Completed \_\_\_\_\_

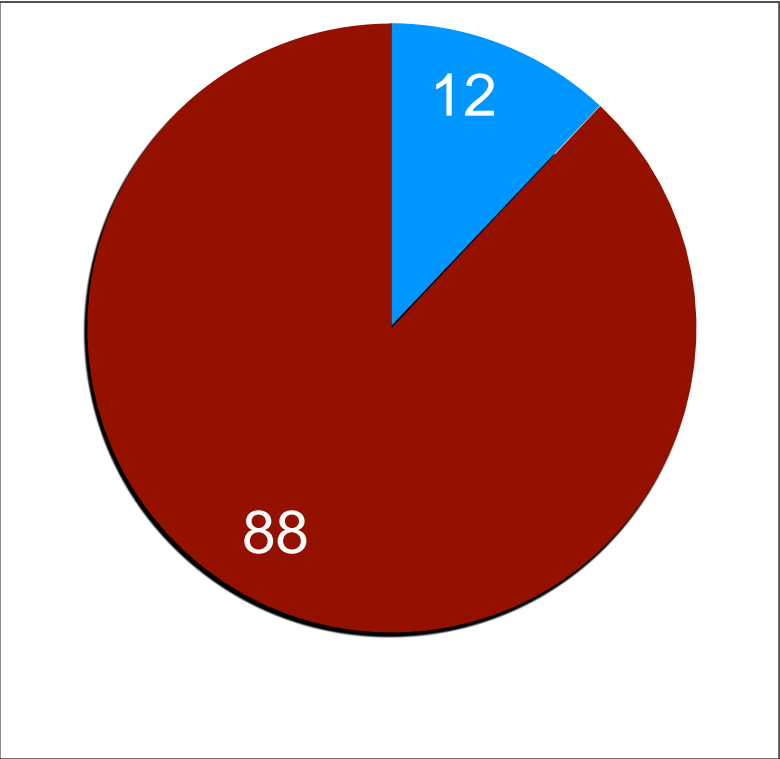
Date \_\_\_\_\_ Examiner \_\_\_\_\_ Reading Level \_\_\_\_\_

List 1	List 2	List 3
fat _____	fatigue _____	allergic _____
flu _____	pelvic _____	menstrual _____
pill _____	jaundice _____	testicle _____
dose _____	infection _____	colitis _____
eye _____	exercise _____	emergency _____
stress _____	behavior _____	medication _____
smear _____	prescription _____	occupation _____
nerves _____	notify _____	sexually _____
germs _____	gallbladder _____	alcoholism _____
meals _____	calories _____	irritation _____
disease _____	depression _____	constipation _____
cancer _____	miscarriage _____	gonorrhea _____
caffeine _____	pregnancy _____	inflammatory _____
attack _____	arthritis _____	diabetes _____
kidney _____	nutrition _____	hepatitis _____
hormones _____	menopause _____	antibiotics _____
herpes _____	appendix _____	diagnosis _____
seizure _____	abnormal _____	potassium _____
bowel _____	syphilis _____	anemia _____
asthma _____	hemorrhoids _____	obesity _____
rectal _____	nausea _____	osteoporosis _____
# of (+) Responses in List 1: _____	# of (+) Responses in List 2: _____	# of (+) Responses in List 3: _____

Raw Score \_\_\_\_\_

# IHS Early Testing for Health Literacy

## NVS Test



- Adequate Health Literacy
- Low Health Literacy

Figure 1A. The newest vital sign — English.

<b>Nutrition Facts</b>	
Serving Size	1/2 cup
Servings per container	4
<b>Amount per serving</b>	
Calories 250	Fat Cal 120
<b>%DV</b>	
<b>Total Fat</b> 13g	20%
Sat Fat 9g	40%
<b>Cholesterol</b> 28mg	12%
<b>Sodium</b> 55mg	2%
<b>Total Carbohydrate</b> 30g	12%
Dietary Fiber 2g	
Sugars 23g	
<b>Protein</b> 4g	8%

\* Percent Daily Values (DV) are based on a 2,000 calorie diet. Your daily values may be higher or lower depending on your calorie needs.

**Ingredients:** Cream, Skim Milk, Liquid Sugar, Water, Egg Yolks, Brown Sugar, Milkfat, Peanut Oil, Sugar, Butter, Salt, Carrageenan, Vanilla Extract.

Note: This single scenario is the final English version of the newest vital sign. The type size should be 14-point (as shown above) or larger. Patients are presented with the above scenario and asked the questions shown in Figure 1b.

Figure 1B. Questions and answers score sheet for the newest vital sign — English.

	ANSWER CORRECT?	
	YES	NO
<b>READ TO SUBJECT:</b> This information is on the back of a container of a pint of ice cream.		
<b>QUESTIONS</b>		
1. If you eat the entire container, how many calories will you eat? <b>Answer</b> <input type="checkbox"/> 1,000 is the only correct answer		
2. If you are allowed to eat 60 g of carbohydrates as a snack, how much ice cream could you have? <b>Answer</b> Any of the following is correct: <input type="checkbox"/> 1 cup (or any amount up to 1 cup) <input type="checkbox"/> Half the container <small>Note: If patient answers "2 servings," ask "How much ice cream would that be if you were to measure it into a bowl?"</small>		
3. Your doctor advises you to reduce the amount of saturated fat in your diet. You usually have 42 g of saturated fat each day, which includes 1 serving of ice cream. If you stop eating ice cream, how many grams of saturated fat would you be consuming each day? <b>Answer</b> 33 is the only correct answer		
4. If you usually eat 2500 calories in a day, what percentage of your daily value of calories will you be eating if you eat one serving? <b>Answer</b> 10% is the only correct answer		
<small>Pretend that you are allergic to the following substances: Penicillin, peanuts, latex gloves, and bee stings.</small>		
5. Is it safe for you to eat this ice cream? <b>Answer</b> <input type="checkbox"/> No		
6. (Ask only if the patient responds "no" to question 5): Why not? <b>Answer</b> Because it has peanut oil.		
<b>Total Correct</b>		

# Assessing Health Literacy

- **OR** you can use simple observation:
  - Hand a brochure to the patient upside down and see if he or she correctly aligns the page in order to read it.
  - Ask the patient if the print on the brochure is clear enough to read.
  - Determine if the patient registration form or others forms are filled out completely and correctly.
  - Notice if the patient gives excuses when asked to read something (e.g., forgot reading glasses, has a headache).
  - Observe if the patient gives medical brochures or materials to person accompanying them.
  - Verify the patient can describe how to take medications.



# How to Use Universal Precautions



**Understanding  
Health Information**



**Navigating the  
Health System**



**Engaging in Self  
Care**



# Understanding Health Information



## Plain Language Is:

- 
- Organizing information so that the most important points come first.
  - Breaking complex information into understandable chunks.
  - Using commonly known and understood words and terms.
  - Eliminating non-essential info.
- 

## Plain Language Is Not:

- “Dumbing-down”.
- Talking down to a person.

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The goal is to communicate at a 6-8th grade reading level.





# Choosing Words

- ▶ Use simpler words (1-2 syllables).
- ▶ Use familiar words (avoid jargon and legalese).



# Choosing Words

Gingiva

Gums

Caries

Cavities





# Choosing Words

Assistance

Help

Bacteria

Germs



# Navigating the Health System



# Navigating the System

When is my next appointment?

Where do I go for care?

Why do I have to fill out all these forms?

Can I go after work?

Who will be treating me?

What are they going to do at my dental appointment?

How can I get to my appointment?

How do I pay for my appointment?

# Engaging in Self Care



# Engaging in Self-Care

- ▶ Combining a patient's knowledge, skills, ability, and willingness to take action to manage his own health and care



# Patient Engagement

- Taking medications as prescribed
- Making healthy food choices
- Becoming physically active
- Avoiding unhealthy activities
- Practicing good hygiene
- Obtaining preventive care
- Showing up for appointments!



# Patient Engagement and You

- ▶ Involve the patient in the conversation.
  - Ask what he is already doing.
  - Listening is important!
  - Provide encouragement.
  - Share resources.

## ▶ Motivational Interviewing!



**Big Ears to listen, Big  
Eyes to See and a  
Small Mouth to Speak**

# Health Literacy Best Practices

- Appointment reminders
- Phone follow-up
- Confirm understanding (Teach-Back Method—see January 2018 webinar)
- Plain Language
- Motivational interviewing
- Shared decision-making
- Kind, supportive staff



# Citations

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- New York State Department of Health (n.d.) Oral health literacy toolkit. Retrieved from <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/53bc58e3e4b060a82ab7359d/t/552d2c18e4b057e7ac6e3e3e/1429023768340/Oral+Health+Literacy+Toolkit.pdf>

# Thank You!

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