

Ask Me 3 is an educational program provided by the **Partnership for Clear Health Communication** to promote clear communication between health care providers and patients.

The **Partnership for Clear Health Communication** is a national, nonprofit coalition of organizations that are working together to promote awareness and solutions around the issue of low health literacy and its effect on health outcomes. The Partnership serves consumers, public health officials, health care professionals, health educators, literacy specialists, patient advocates and caregivers, health associations and policymakers.

The Partnership and its individual members are committed to offering free and low-cost resources and programs that deliver patient information, medical education and practice management tools to care and information providers.

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www.askme3.org

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Do you know?

Which of the following is the strongest predictor of an individual's health status?

A. Age

B. Income

C. Literacy skills

D. Employment status

E. Education level

F. Racial or ethnic group



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Answer: C – Literacy Skills

Surprised? If so, you are not alone.

According to the Institute of Medicine, nearly half of all American adults — 90 million people — have difficulty understanding and using health information.

What Is Health Literacy?

Health literacy is the ability to read, understand and effectively use basic medical instructions and information. Low health literacy can affect anyone of any age, ethnicity, background, or education level.

People with low health literacy:

- Are often less likely to comply with prescribed treatment and self-care regimens.
- Fail to seek preventive care and are at higher (more than double) risk for hospitalization.
- Remain in the hospital nearly two days longer than adults with higher health literacy.
- Often require additional care that results in annual health care costs that are four times higher than for those with higher literacy skills.

What Do I Need to Do?

1. Answer 3

Along with encouraging your patients to use the Ask Me 3™ approach, simple techniques can increase your patients' comfort level with asking questions, as well as compliance with your instructions after they leave appointments.

- Create a safe environment where patients feel comfortable talking openly with you.
- Use plain language instead of technical language or medical jargon.
- Sit down (instead of standing) to achieve eye level with your patient.
- Use visual models to illustrate a procedure or condition.
- Ask patients to “teach back” the care instructions you give to them.

2. Learn more about low health literacy

Go to www.AskMe3.org for research studies on the issue of low health literacy, a white paper detailing the scope and impact of the problem, and communication tools to help you in your practice.

3. Incorporate new knowledge into your practice

Broadening your knowledge of the low health literacy issue and associated concerns will help you to better treat your patients. A list of additional literacy resources, explanations of interaction techniques, and examples of simple interventions are also available at www.AskMe3.org.

- Additional factors that may hinder understanding include:

- Intimidation, fear, vulnerability
- Shock upon hearing a diagnosis
- Extenuating stress within the patient's family
- Multiple health conditions to understand and treat

Myth: Encouraging my patients to ask more questions will increase the length of their visit. I simply can't afford to spend more time with each patient.

Reality: Fearing lengthy appointments, most doctors allow patients to talk for an average of 22 seconds before taking the lead. Research shows, however, that if allowed to speak freely, the average patient would initially speak for less than two minutes. Encouraging questions during the initial visit may require a short-term time investment; however, the long-term payoff may include more accurate compliance, less follow-up visits, and shorter, more focused interactions as the patient proceeds through his/her condition.



Why Is It Important to Me?

Chances are high that some of your patients are among the 90 million people in the United States whose health may be at risk because of difficulty in understanding and acting on health information.

In fact, you may not even know that these patients are in your practice because:

- They are often embarrassed or ashamed to admit they have difficulty understanding health information and instructions.
- They are using well-practiced coping mechanisms that effectively mask their problem.



The **Partnership for Clear Health Communication** can help physicians and other clinicians gain access to information, resources and practical tools. Among these tools is a new patient education program called **Ask Me 3™**, which is designed to enhance communication between patients and providers.

Patients Should Be Encouraged to Understand the Answers to Three Questions:

1. What is my main problem?
2. What do I need to do?
3. Why is it important for me to do this?

Materials to encourage patients to **Ask Me 3** are available at www.AskMe3.org or by calling **1-877-427-5633**.



Myth vs. Reality

As an emerging public health issue, low health literacy is often misunderstood as a condition that affects a small, specific portion of the population. In reality, its scope is much broader and its impact much more severe.

Myth: Most people with low literacy skills come from minority backgrounds.

Reality: Although ethnic minority groups are disproportionately affected by low literacy, the majority of those with low literacy skills in the United States are white, native-born Americans.

- Others who are especially vulnerable in a health care situation include:
 - Older patients
 - Recent immigrants (who may be highly literate in their native language)
 - People with a chronic disease
 - Those with low socioeconomic status

Myth: My patients are generally well-read and college-educated. They understand the information I give to them.

Reality: The average American reads at the 8th-9th grade level; however, health information is usually written at a higher reading level. Most patients – regardless of their reading or language skills – prefer medical information that is simple and easy to understand.