

Making Health Literacy Part of Your Dental Practice

AN ACTION GUIDE



Oral Health Literacy is the ability to understand and act on health information.

Many adults have difficulty comprehending the information given to them at the dental office—even those that are highly educated. The result can be poor compliance with oral hygiene instructions and treatment adherence, errors in taking medications, missed appointments, and frequent calls to the office staff.

An important component of health literacy is the provider's ability to communicate clearly and effectively. You and your team can learn effective communication skills and apply them to everything you do...

1. Learn about Health Literacy- there are some great health literacy resources online for your team, ex. the California Department of Public Health's oral health literacy guide- [Oral Health Literacy in Practice](#).
2. Assess the health literacy of your practice:
 - a. Initial Contact- Ask about preferred language, explain the visit
 - b. Plain language forms- are your health history forms easy to understand?
 - c. Identify translation/interpretation needs-Does the patient need an interpreter?
 - d. Plain language signs
3. Communication with patients:
 - a. Start with empathy
 - b. Use the **“Teach-back” technique**
 1. Give simple, clear instructions
 2. Ask the patient to explain or demonstrate back
 3. If they have difficulty- try again in a different way, use examples
 - c. Implement **“Motivational Interviewing”** in a “Judgment-Free Zone”
 1. Ask the patient about their barriers to changing behaviors
 2. Ask what they think they can change and make a plan
 3. Document counseling, and follow-up next visit
 - d. Use of **Visual Aids**-models and diagrams can be very helpful for children and adults

For more information and a list of resources: go to [ADA/HealthEquity.org](https://www.ada.org/HealthEquity.org)