

# October is Health Literacy Month

It's estimated that more than 90 million Americans have low health literacy, which means they may not be able to understand health information, make informed choices about their care, navigate our complex health care system or communicate effectively with their health care team or families. This can lead to confusion, compromised patient safety and costly medical mistakes.

Low health literacy can affect anyone, even those with a college degree or a career in health care.

The Joint Commission calls upon health care providers to provide effective communication for patients and families and to integrate health literacy concepts into their day-to-day practice. However, not all providers have the needed health literacy skills or training to do so. Listed below are several strategies for promoting health literacy and resources which can be helpful to all health care professionals, regardless of their familiarity with the subject.

Strategies to improve health literacy focus on improving written and spoken communication, self-management and empowerment and supportive systems.



Look at patients when talking and listening – try not to interrupt.

## Supportive systems

Assess each patient's needs and support system.

Link patients to other support systems when needed, such as social work and financial counselors.

Source: *AHRQ Health Literacy Universal Precautions Toolkit*, 2nd edition

## Health Literacy Resources

[Always use Teach](#)