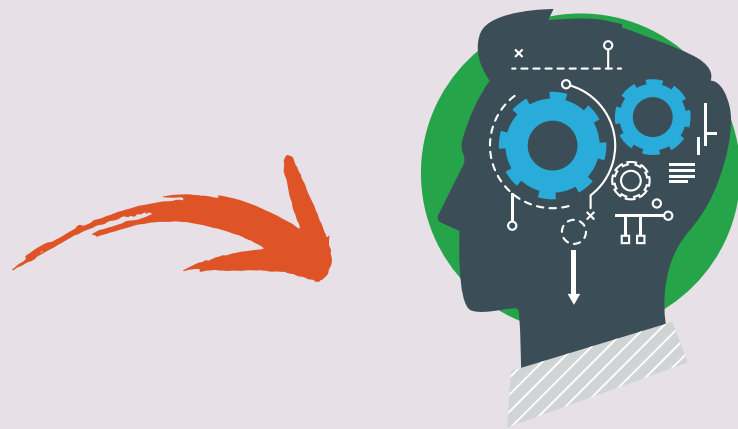


# HEALTH LITERACY

## The Path to Patient Empowerment

### What Is Health Literacy?

Health literacy is the degree to which your patient can **access, understand and apply** basic health information and services needed to make optimal health decisions.<sup>1</sup>



Information *Heard*



Information *Processed*



Information *Understood*

Every day, a Rockford resident walks into your health system and becomes a patient.

Each patient's experience is informed by their individual beliefs, attitudes, behaviors, racial or ethnic background, socioeconomic status, English proficiency and more! In some cases, these factors can limit the patient's ability to access, understand and apply health information and potentially result in inequitable health outcomes. Fortunately, you can exercise everyday health literacy strategies to ensure your patients leave every interaction feeling empowered.

## HEALTH LITERACY STRATEGIES

Approaches you can use with every patient, every time.



Address each patient by name and make eye contact when speaking—do not turn your back.<sup>3</sup>



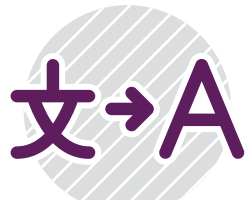
Encourage patient engagement by asking open-ended questions.<sup>4</sup>



Practice cultural humility with patients by being kind, curious and meeting the patient where they're at.<sup>2</sup>



Ask the patient if they have any questions or concerns, then summarize key points before ending a visit.<sup>4</sup>



Present information to a patient in plain language (avoid excessive medical terminology) and use teaching methods that work for them (physical models, videos, pictures, etc.).<sup>4</sup>



Have the patient confirm they understand the procedure by asking them to repeat back your instruction in their own words, also known as the “teach-back” method, when introducing a new procedure or new information.<sup>4</sup>

### Why Use These Health Literacy Strategies?

Health Literacy Skills Are Necessary to Understand<sup>3</sup>:



Medical terms and human biology



Diagnosis and test results



Health care issues that impact your community during local elections



Risks and benefits of a treatment or medication



Self-care guidelines



Complex health systems

Poor Health Literacy Is Associated With a Higher Risk of:



Death



Hospitalization



Emergency room visits



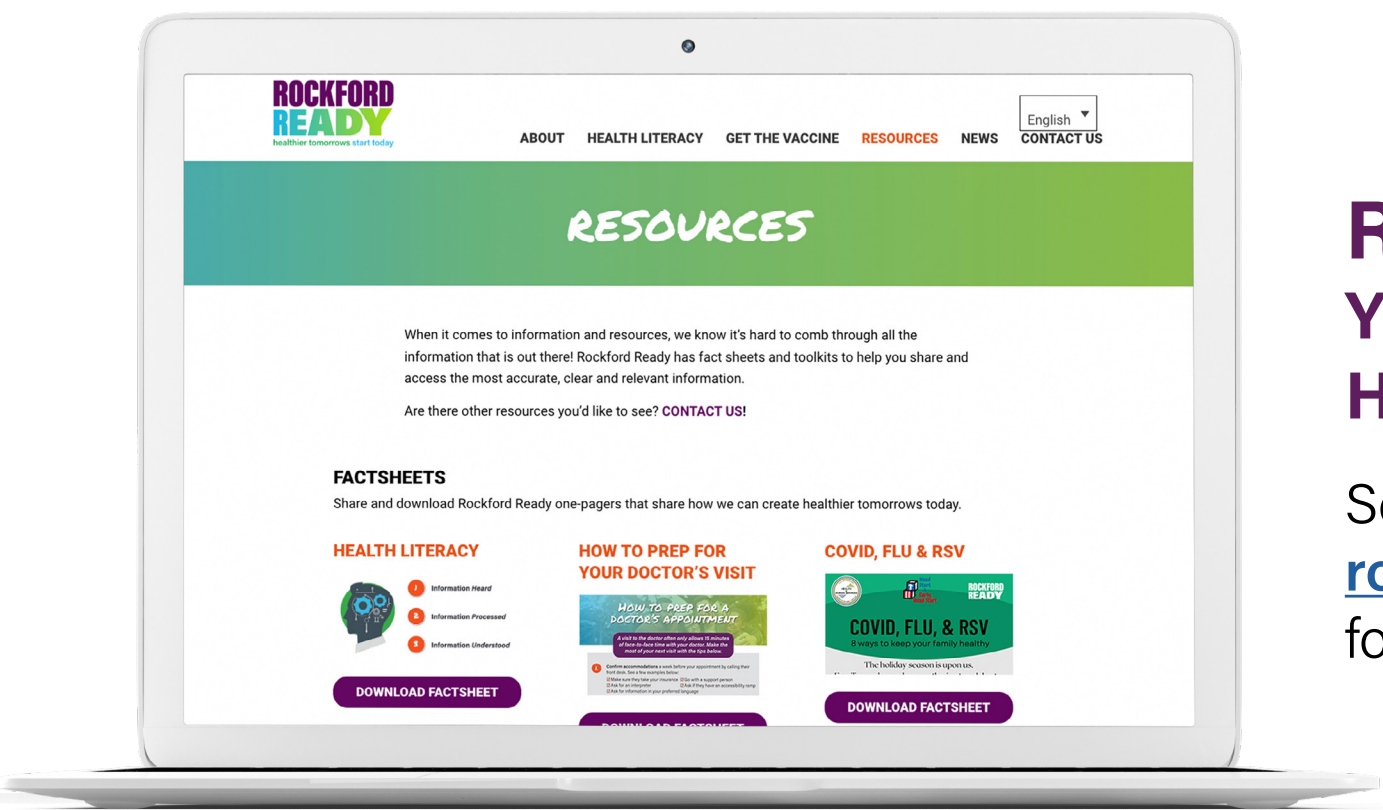
Making poor or suboptimal decisions about treatment



Incorrectly taking medicines



Poor disease outcomes



### Resources: Your One-Stop Source for Health Literacy Information

Scan the QR code or visit us at:  
[rockfordready.org/resources](https://rockfordready.org/resources)  
for more health literacy resources.



Have Questions?  
[info@rockfordhealth.org](mailto:info@rockfordhealth.org)

<sup>1</sup> Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion (n.d.). History of Health Literacy Definitions. Health.gov. <https://health.gov/healthypeople/priority-areas/health-literacy-healthy-people-2030/history-health-literacy-definitions>.

<sup>2</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2022, August 8). Embrace cultural humility and community engagement. Retrieved from <https://www.cdc.gov/globalhealth/equity/guide/cultural-humility.html>.

<sup>3</sup> Neilsen-Bohman, L., Panzer, A. M., & Kindig, D. A. (2004). Health Literacy: A Prescription to End Confusion. Washington, DC: National Academies Press.

<sup>4</sup> Weiss, B. D. (2003). Health Literacy: A Manual for Clinicians. American Medical Association and American Medical Association Foundation. Retrieved from <http://lib.ncfh.org/pdfs/6617.pdf>.

A Health Literacy Guide Developed by Rockford Ready and the Rockford Regional Health Council.

This program is led by the City of Rockford, in partnership with the University of Illinois Chicago, College of Medicine, Office of Health Literacy and UIC College of Medicine Rockford as well as CURA Strategies. This program is supported by the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Health/Office of Minority Health of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) as part of an award with 100 percent funded by the OASH/OMH/HHS. The contents are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent the official views of, nor an endorsement, by the OASH/OMH/HHS. For more information, please visit <https://minorityhealth.hhs.gov>.