

HEALTH LITERACY

Health literacy IS a shared responsibility between patients and providers, where both must communicate information in a way the other can understand. Health literacy is NOT just a concern for those who cannot read. People have difficulty understanding health information for many reasons including literacy, age, disability, language, culture, stress, and emotion.

Health literacy helps patients FIND, UNDERSTAND, and USE health information to manage health problems and prevent complications.

WHY IS HEALTH LITERACY IMPORTANT TO PATIENTS WITH KIDNEY DISEASE?

Time Restraints

- Patients need to understand health information quickly because they have less face-to-face time with their providers.

Complex Tasks

- Patients, their family, and other caregivers are expected to correctly accomplish a wide array of health-related tasks to manage kidney disease.
- These tasks may be complex and unfamiliar, such as using new types of technology, following dietary restrictions, attending regular appointments, and taking medication on time-sensitive schedules.

Patient Comprehension

- Patients must be active learners.
- This includes reading information given to them by providers as well as assessing the credibility and relevance of health information from family and friends, popular media, and the internet.

Provider Interpretation

- Patients are increasingly seen as active consumers rather than passive recipients of treatment and care.
- Patients today are often asked to make key health decisions and expected to advocate on their own behalf.

Low health literacy in patients with end stage renal disease is associated with a higher mortality risk.¹ Improving health literacy may have positive outcomes such as reducing hospitalizations, increasing access to transplant, and improving quality of life.² One strategy to address health literacy is use of the teach-back method for patient education.¹

1. End Stage Renal Disease National Coordinating Center. 2022. Health literacy fact sheet. https://esrdncc.org/contentassets/8fb239e240ac44e9a1998e5334eadfe8/healthliteracy_factsheet_2022.pdf
2. Cavanaugh et al. 2010. Low health literacy associates with increased mortality in ESRD. DOI 10.1681/ASN.2009111163

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