



SOUTH CAROLINA FAMILY AND COMMUNITY LEADERS

Affiliated with National Volunteer Outreach Network, Country Women's Council, U.S.A., Associated Country Women of the World and in partnership with Clemson University Cooperative Extension Service
SCFCL website: <http://www.scfcl.com>

Leader Training Guide

What Is Health Literacy and Why Does It Matter?

Objectives:

Upon completion of this lesson, participants will be able to:

- Define health literacy and explain why it is important for overall health and well-being.
- Demonstrate how to read and understand basic prescription labels, including instructions for dosage and storage.
- Interpret nutrition labels to make healthier food choices and certain identify ingredients
- Describe effective ways to communicate with healthcare providers.
- Recognize the value of seeking educational and support resources

Lesson Overview/Introduction:

Have you ever looked at a prescription label and wondered exactly what it meant? Or tried to read a nutrition label at the store but weren't quite sure what to look for? Maybe you've left a doctor's appointment still feeling unsure about what was said or what you were supposed to do next.

That's where health literacy comes in.

Health literacy means being able to find, understand, and use health information—so you can make good choices for your health. It helps us know how to take medications safely, what to eat to feel better, how to ask the right questions at the doctor's office, and when to get help.

After defining health literacy, ask:

"Can anyone share a time when health info was confusing or unclear?"

Today, we're going to break this idea down in a simple, useful way. We'll look at:

- How to read prescription labels correctly
- How to make sense of nutrition labels at the grocery store
- How to talk with your doctor or pharmacist and get the answers you need
- And how to find support and education if you're managing a health condition

Health literacy isn't about knowing everything, it's about knowing how and where to get the information that helps you stay healthy and make informed decisions.

Lesson:

Why are Prescription Labels Important?

- Prescription labels give us directions on how to properly take our medications. Understanding prescription labels will help us know whether the medication should be taken with or without food, at a certain time or day, or be stored at a certain temperature. Ask your pharmacist to explain your prescription label the next time you pick up your medications.

Why are Nutrition Labels Important?

- Before reviewing nutrition labels: Ask "what's the first thing you usually look at on a food label—if anything?"
- Nutrition labels help us identify unhealthy nutrients we should limit, like saturated fat, excess sodium, and added sugars. Nutrition labels also help us identify nutrient-dense foods that contain vitamins, minerals, fiber, protein, and healthy fats. For people with food allergies, reading ingredient list on nutrition labels can even be lifesaving. Talk to your healthcare professional about what you should look for when reading nutrition labels.

Communicate with your Healthcare Provider

- Write down a list of questions to discuss with your doctor before each appointment. Be honest and speak up about any concerns you have. When talking with your doctor, be clear and concise about any symptoms you are experiencing. Take notes or bring a

support person with you to your appointments to help you better understand and retain the information your doctor provides.

Ask your Health Care Provider for Resources

- Ask your healthcare provider for education or support opportunities for conditions specific to you. If you are pregnant, your doctor may recommend a breastfeeding or birthing class. If you have mental health concerns, your doctor may connect you with support groups or other mental health resources. Those with chronic conditions such as high blood pressure or diabetes may benefit from joining self-management and support programs.

Lesson Summary:

We learned how health literacy helps us make better health decisions.

We covered:

- Reading prescription labels to take medications safely.
- Understanding nutrition labels to make healthier food choices.
- Communicating with healthcare providers to ask questions and get the information we need.
- Finding support and educational resources to manage health conditions.

Improving your health literacy is about asking questions and knowing where to find reliable information. By using these tools, you'll feel more confident in taking charge of your health. Take one step today to improve your health literacy—whether it's checking a medication label, asking a question at your next doctor's visit, or looking at a nutrition label next time you are at the grocery store.

Suggested Activities:

1. Reading Nutrition Labels

- Suggested Materials: A variety of food nutrition labels to review as a group and discuss key things to look at when reading a nutrition label such as:
 - Serving/portion size- the amount of food the label information is based on. Be aware of the actual serving size you eat, as it might be larger or smaller than the one listed
 - Calories- consider your daily calorie needs and how this serving contributes to them
 - Things we want to limit- saturated fat, trans fat, sodium, and added sugars
 - Nutrients we want more of- fiber, vitamins, and minerals.
- Compare and contrast different labels and identify which product is the healthier choice and why.

2. Reading Prescription Labels

- Create a few mock prescription labels, and the participant's job is to identify anything that seems unclear, missing, or potentially dangerous.
- Suggested Materials: 2–3 printed sample prescription labels (use big, easy-to-read text)
 - Some with clear, correct instructions
 - Some with mistakes or missing information (e.g., no time of day, no dosage, conflicting info)
- Group discussion:
 - Is anything missing?
 - Is there anything that's confusing?
 - What would you ask your pharmacist about this?

3. Short Reflection Activity

- Name two things you'll look for next time you check a prescription label.
- What question might you ask your doctor at your next visit?

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Sources/References:

1. [Health Literacy Month. \(2024, October 17\). *About Health Literacy*.](#)
2. [Health Resources and Services Administration. \(2024, October 17\). *Addressing Health Literacy*.](#)
3. [Rowe, E. P., Shifflette, H., & Riggins, B. \(2024, October 25\). *Health literacy leads to healthier lives*. Clemson University Home & Garden Information Center.](#)