

Health literacy in critical care

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HEALTH LITERACY

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Definition

People having the skills, knowledge, confidence and understanding to access, understand, evaluate, use and navigate health and social information and services.

More than the ability to read

16% UK adults cannot read – approx. 7 million adults

Patient activation



The Problem

- The average reading age in the UK is 9 years old
- The information provided in the NHS is aimed at a reading age of 14-16
- Healthcare professionals' ability to transmit information to the public.
- Poor health literacy costs the NHS 3-5% of budget. Approx £7 billion

What does this look like

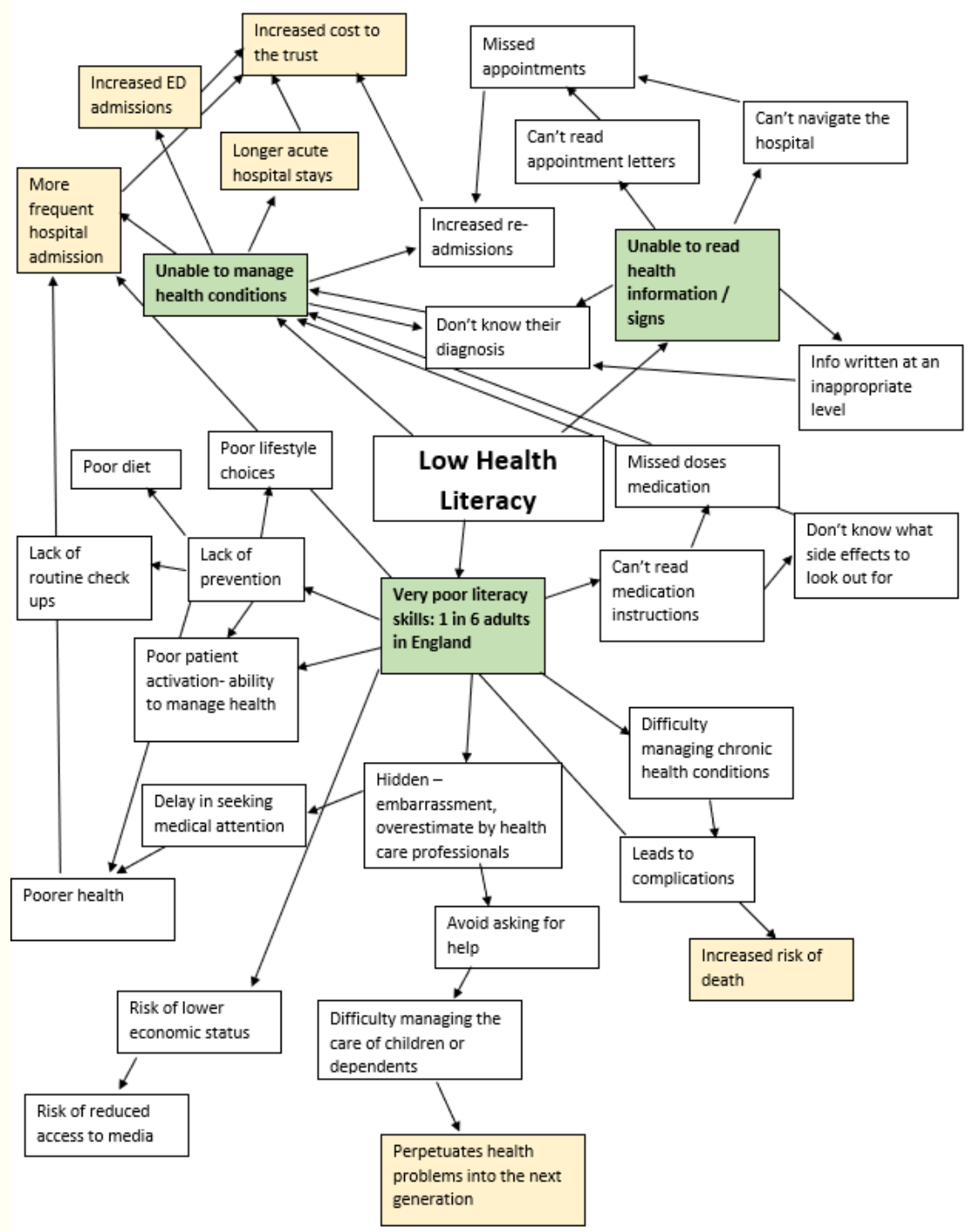
Your doctor tells you:

“You have a 1 in 10 chance of developing Disease A and a 1 in 20 chance of developing Disease B in the next 10 years.”

- Which disease are you at a higher risk of getting?
- What did most people with low health literacy say?

Are hospitals easy to navigate?





Health Literacy discrepancies

- ▶ Government Survey in 2011 revealed this issue
- ▶ Study in 2015 found no improvement and health data still too complex for the majority

Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (2011)

Rowlands et al (2015)

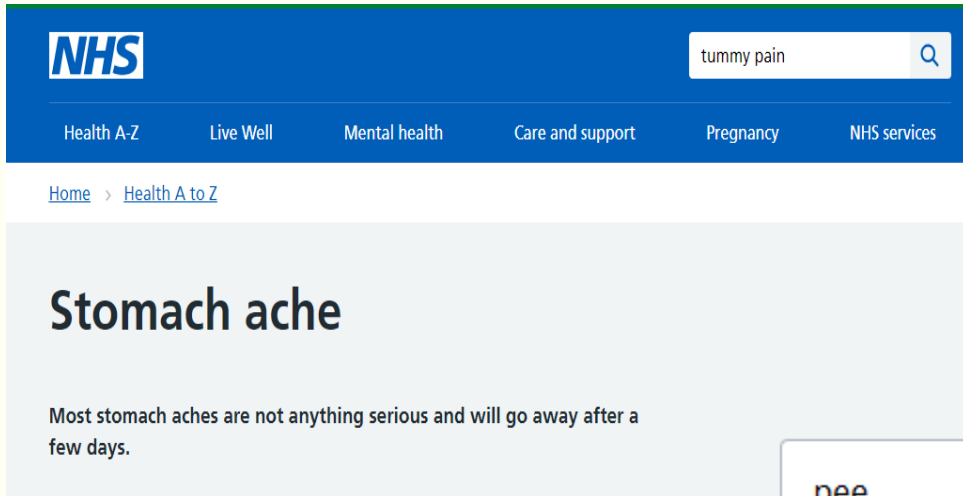
St Ledger et al (2021)

Box 2. English National Qualifications Framework (NQF)

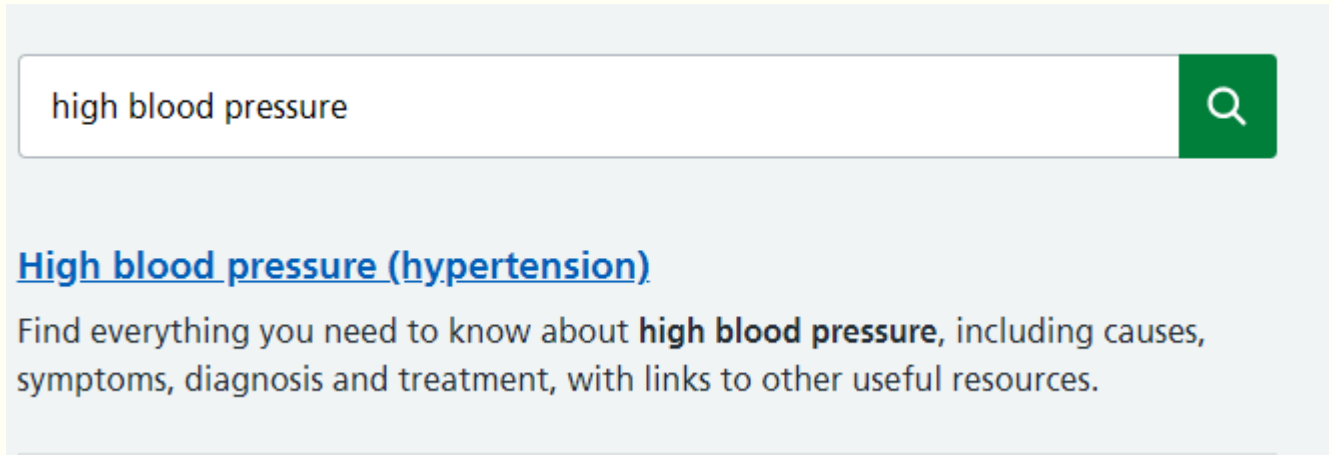
Level	English NQF age equivalent	Literacy An adult classified at the level understands	Numeracy An adult classified at the level understands	Examples of typical skills
Entry 1	5-7 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Short texts with repeated language patterns on familiar topics • Information from common signs and symbols 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information given by numbers and symbols in simple graphical, numerical, and written material 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Write short messages • Select floor numbers in lifts
Entry 2	7-9 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Short straightforward texts on familiar topics • Information from short documents, familiar sources, signs, and symbols 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information given by numbers, symbols, simple diagrams, and charts in graphical, numerical, and written material 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Describe health symptoms • Use a cashpoint machine
Entry 3	9-11 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Short straightforward texts on familiar topics accurately and independently • Information from everyday sources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information given by numbers, symbols, diagrams, and charts used for different purposes and in different ways in graphical, numerical, and written material 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understand price labels • Pay household bills
Level 1	Matriculation examinations (GCSE) grade D-G	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Short straightforward texts of varying length on a variety of topics accurately and independently • Information from different sources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Straightforward mathematical information used for different purposes. Independently select relevant information from given graphical, numerical, and written material 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GCSE grades D-G
Level 2 or above	GCSE grades A* to C or higher qualifications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A range of texts of varying complexity accurately and independently • Can obtain information of varying length and detail from different sources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mathematical information used for different purposes and can independently select and compare relevant information from a variety of graphical, numerical, and written material 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 5 grades A* to C GCSE

Government Initiatives

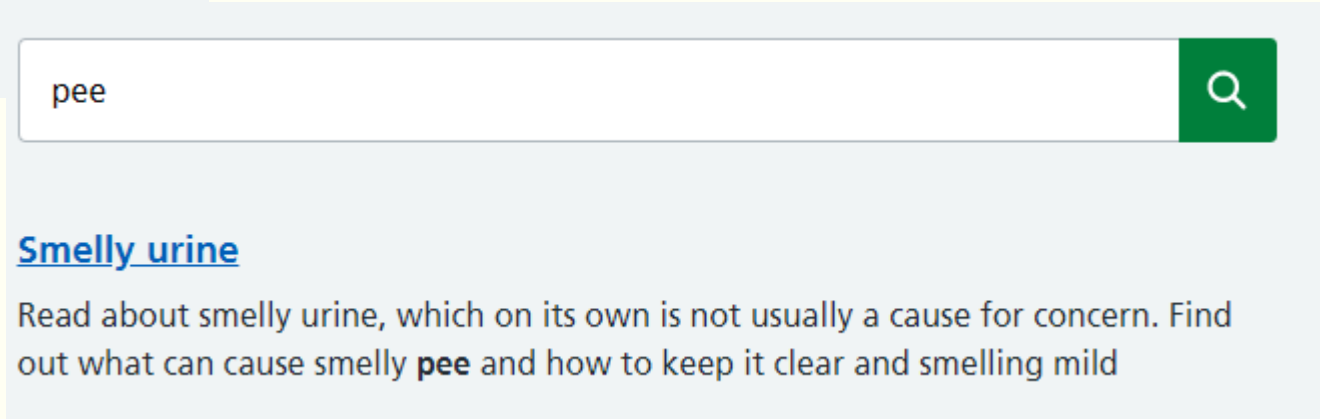
On the NHS website, you can now search layman's terms and get the answer you need.



The screenshot shows the NHS website header with the NHS logo on the left and a search bar containing 'tummy pain' on the right. Below the search bar is a navigation menu with links for 'Health A-Z', 'Live Well', 'Mental health', 'Care and support', 'Pregnancy', and 'NHS services'. Below the navigation menu is a breadcrumb trail: 'Home > Health A to Z'. The main content area features a large heading 'Stomach ache' and a sub-heading 'Most stomach aches are not anything serious and will go away after a few days.'



The screenshot shows a search bar with 'high blood pressure' and a green search button. Below the search bar is a heading '[High blood pressure \(hypertension\)](#)' and a paragraph: 'Find everything you need to know about **high blood pressure**, including causes, symptoms, diagnosis and treatment, with links to other useful resources.'



The screenshot shows a search bar with 'pee' and a green search button. Below the search bar is a heading '[Smelly urine](#)' and a paragraph: 'Read about smelly urine, which on its own is not usually a cause for concern. Find out what can cause smelly **pee** and how to keep it clear and smelling mild'

Specific to ITU

- Explaining complex conditions
- End of life care and palliation
- Unique position at the bedside/ in family chats
- How can we improve management of long term conditions

Techniques to improve

- Teach back
- Chunk and Check
- Simple language
- Routinely offer help

Teach back

- Half in/ half out
- Give information using simple plain language
- Ask them to repeat it back in their own words

‘medical things can be complicated, we don’t expect you to understand them, so just to make sure I have been clear, can you tell me what you’ve understood’

‘can you tell me how you’re going to explain what we have talked about to your family when you get home?’

- If they struggle, re-explain using different words, avoid jargon, use pictures or similes if needed
- Ask them to explain again

Chunk and Check

- We give people a lot of information
- Break it down into sections
- Check back after each section using the teach back technique
- Summarise at the end
- Get them to repeat it back

Simple language

- Don't use jargon, acronyms or medical words
- Stick to the same terms- switching between terms is confusing
- Use short sentences
- Use active verbs- they are easier to understand
- Use similes or comparisons
- Imagine you are explaining things to a child of 8 years old

Acute

– Sudden / Serious / Severe

Chronic

– Long term?

Referral

– “I'm going to send you to [insert name of health profession]”

Hypertension

– High blood pressure

Radiology

– X-Ray

Routinely offer help

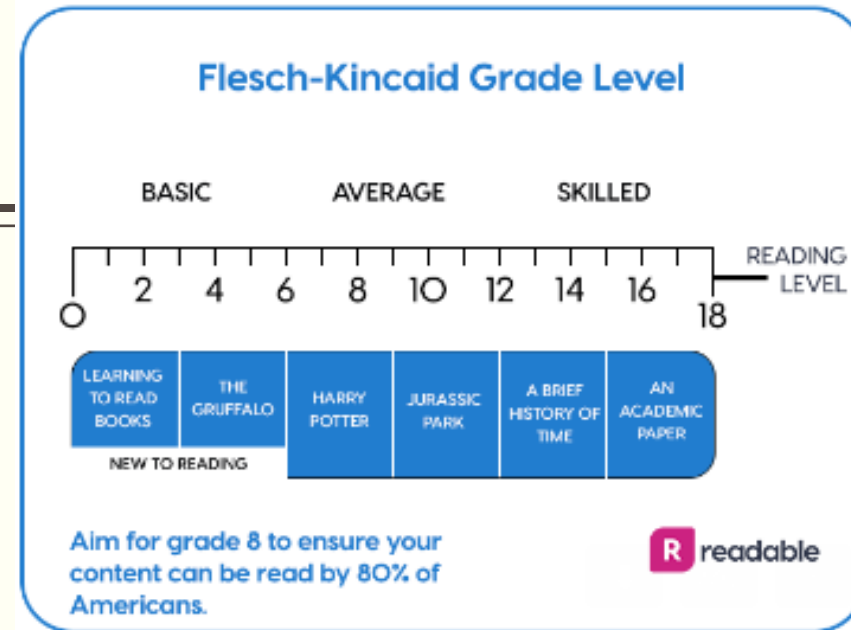
- Don't assume that people can read or write
- Use a variety of media to share information
- Doctor Google
- Time saver

Creating content

Assess the readability by using scoring tools

How Flesch Reading Ease Scores Translate to Reading Difficulty

Reading Ease Score	Descriptive Categories	Estimated Reading Grade
90 – 100	Very Easy	5 th Grade
80 – 90	Easy	6 th Grade
70 – 80	Fairly Easy	7 th Grade
60 – 70	Standard / Plain English	8 th and 9 th Grade
50 – 60	Fairly Difficult	10 th to 12 th Grade (High School Sophomore to Senior)
30 – 50	Difficult	In College
0 – 30	Very Difficult	College Graduate



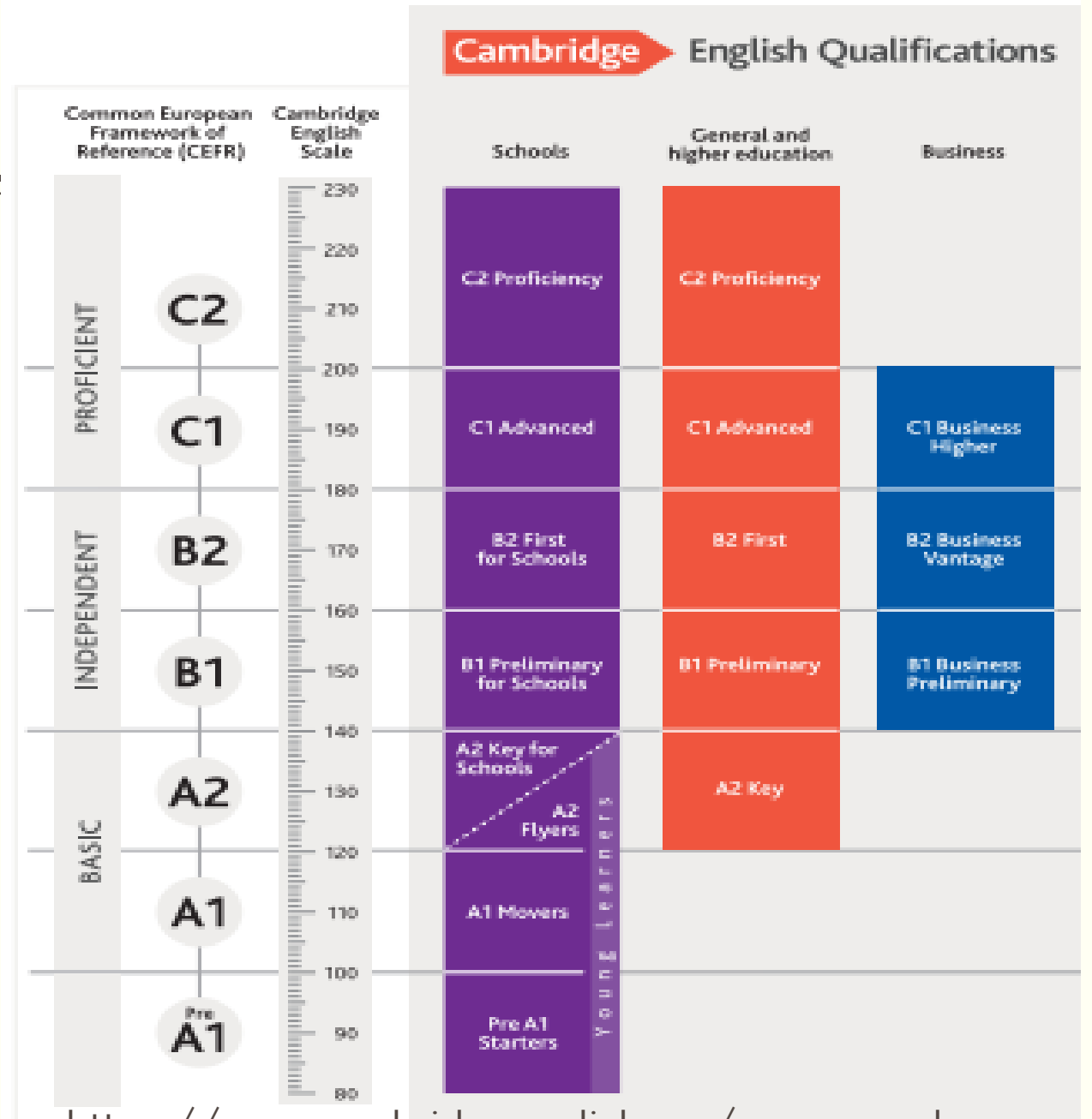
Fog Index	Reading level by grade
17	College graduate
16	College senior
15	College junior
14	College sophomore
13	College freshman
12	High school senior
11	High school junior
10	High school sophomore
9	High school freshman
8	Eighth grade
7	Seventh grade
6	Sixth grade

Adjusting your vocabulary

The CEFR

<https://www.englishprofile.org/wordlists/evp>

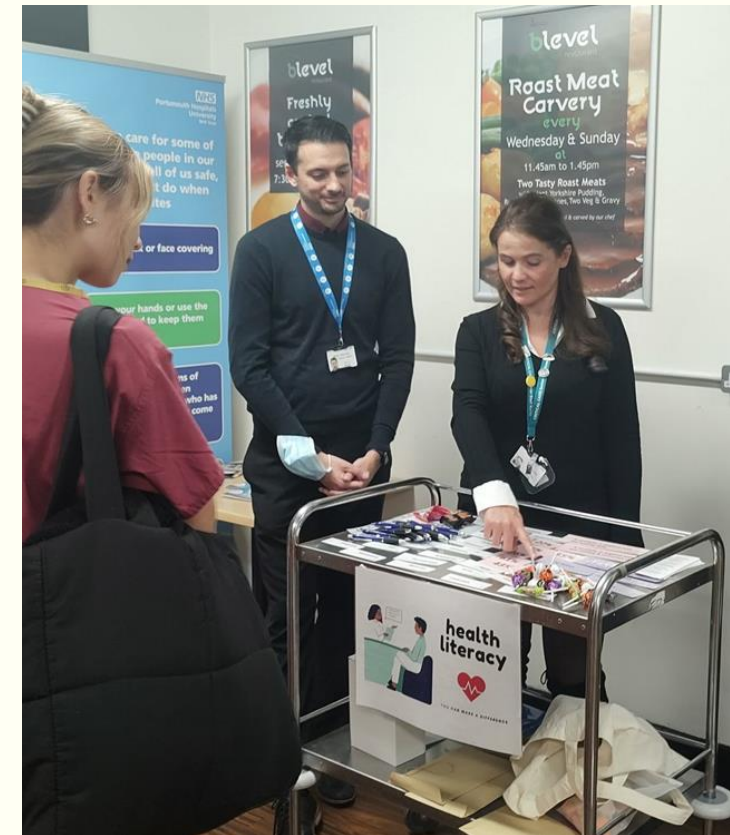
Base Word	Guideword	Level
assess		B2
sibling		C2
deteriorate		C1
pass away		B2
critical	SERIOUS	B2



<https://www.cambridgeenglish.org/exams-and-tests/cefr/>

Things we can do on a trust level

- Promote health literacy training for staff
 - Incorporate health literacy training into all inductions for all staff groups
 - Advertise the health literacy training that already exists on ESR- Trolley dashes
 - Incorporate Health literacy training into the yearly essential update
 - Impact statement for HEE
- Review all patient information
 - Design a discharge summary for patients that contain simple language
 - Add in layman's terms to hospital signs
 - Use resources to simplify language on all forms, consent, leaflets, information




Dominique and Aaron teaching at a trolley dash. Photo by Rebecca Howes



NHS Knowledge and Library Services **NHS**

43% OF ADULTS ...struggle to read and understand words-based health information

Use our free geodata tool to pinpoint health literacy in your area

Improve your skills and support patients, their families and carers to navigate health and care.  library.nhs.uk/health-information

NHS Knowledge and Library Services **NHS**

Health literacy and patient information

Many people in England have poor health and digital literacy. This means they may not understand important information, such as how to take medicines, details of appointment letters and test results. Or, they may not be able to actually access information if it is online.

NHS funded resources to improve local health literacy include:

- **Local health literacy data** to help tackle health inequalities using our online tool.
- **Free, 35-minute** health literacy elearning course which provides skills to make communicating health information easier
- **Free, easy-read guides** to support people preparing for an appointment and make the right choices about their health.

Go to library.nhs.uk/health-information

NHS Portsmouth Hospitals University NHS Trust

Teach Back

Teach-back is a really simple way to check patient's understanding. **Simply asking 'is that clear?' or 'have you understood everything?' doesn't work.**

It involves asking patients to explain or demonstrate, in their own words, what you've discussed with them – for example: **'To be sure I've explained this consent form clearly, can you tell me what you are agreeing to?'**

If patients don't restate the information correctly, then try explaining again using different words, drawing a diagram or simplifying instructions, then use teach back again.

If, after two or three attempts, the patient still does not "get it," then ask a colleague for help or look for another explanation such as the need for an interpreter.

HEE Health Literacy 'How to' Guide 

Health Literacy Training and Awareness

eLearning for healthcare course 

Alternatively go to ESR and search Health Literacy on the course catalogue for the same course

Health Literacy: You can make a difference 

What can we do

- Create a medicines prompt for discharge TTO's to cover the five important questions: (Guys and St Thomas)
 - Why is it important to take this medicine?
 - What are the consequences of not taking this medicine?
 - If I feel better, should I continue to take this medicine?
 - What are the side effects of this medicine?
 - What should I do if I experience side effects?
- Its Okay to ask campaign (Stoke on Trent)
 - What is my main problem?
 - What do I need to do?
 - Why is it important for me to do this?
 - What do I need to look out for that could be a sign of deterioration

Further resources

- ESR or E-Learning for Healthcare

The screenshot shows a learning management system interface. At the top, there are three icons: a green 'Learning' icon, a blue 'Course Catalogue' icon, and a red 'Learning History' icon. Below these are navigation tabs: 'Current Learning' (active), 'Requested Learning', and 'Forums and Chats'. A search bar is present with a dropdown menu set to 'Course', an input field, an 'Exact Phrase' checkbox, a 'Go' button, and an 'Advanced Search' link. The main content area shows 'Learning: Current Learning >' followed by 'Course: 000 Health Literacy'. Below this, there is a link 'Use this page to view the course details.' and another link 'Show Key Notation'. The 'Offering' section contains a table with the following data:

Offering Name	Language	Delivery Mode
000 Health Literacy	English	📺 Online e-Learning

> [Nurs Stand.](#) 2022 Oct 5;37(10):27-34. doi: 10.7748/ns.2022.e11875. Epub 2022 Jul 20.

Understanding and mitigating low health literacy

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Affiliations + expand

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Abstract

To take control of their health, patients and their families and carers need to understand the information they receive from healthcare professionals and be able to apply that information - in short, they require optimal health literacy. People with low health literacy may find it challenging to manage their condition and take steps to prevent ill-health, which may lead to an increased use of healthcare services. Low health literacy is one of the main barriers preventing healthcare professionals from adequately transmitting information to people in their care. It is crucial that nurses do not assume that everyone will understand information about their health, so nurses should adapt their communication and create an environment where people feel empowered to ask questions. This article describes factors affecting health literacy, explains the consequences of low health literacy, and identifies strategies and techniques nurses can use to mitigate low health literacy.

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