

Health and Wellness

News You Can Use

Health literacy: Understanding the complex language of healthcare

Have you left a doctor's office wondering what you were told about your health, or what exactly you were supposed to be doing to get better or prevent problems getting worse? If you are a typical patient, it's not uncommon to get to the car or bus and have already forgotten some of the information your doctor just discussed with you.

Understanding what health information means, following the recommended instructions from a healthcare provider and knowing how to find health information when you need it is known as "health literacy." Low health literacy affects all patients at one point or another. You're often being asked to process and retain complicated health terms like diseases or how to take prescriptions correctly.

Patients with low health literacy may end up not following their doctor's orders, which can be very risky for their health and result in additional care and expenses. There are thousands of unnecessary patient hospitalizations and deaths each year related to low health literacy.

We all know if you don't understand what prescriptions to have filled, how to properly take your medication, that a follow-up visit is needed or that a lifestyle change is required, you're going to struggle to maintain or improve your health. However, with so much information being thrown at you — how do you keep it all straight?



Tips for understanding and following your doctor's orders

The following tips will help you understand doctor's orders and take a proactive role in your health:

- Gather basic information from your doctor about any conditions you suffer from and the potential treatment options. The more you know, the better.

- Seek clarification right away for anything that you do not understand. If the doctor says something you do not understand, ask that it be repeated in an easier-to-understand way.

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- New information can take multiple times of hearing it before you really understand. If you are given a new set of instructions, repeat them back to the doctor to confirm your understanding. If you are given a new device or equipment to use, ask the doctor or nurse to show you how to use and then show them what you learned. Take time to make sure you are doing everything correctly.
- If you have questions after you leave, don't hesitate to call the doctor's office. In most cases, a nurse or physician's assistant can answer your question or will have your doctor return your call.
- Take notes or take along a friend or family member who can take notes for you. If possible, and with your doctors permission, record the conversation with a smartphone or voice recorder to replay it at home for you and your family or another doctor.
- Ask family and friends to assist you in following the orders that your doctor has outlined for you.
- Talk with your doctor about potential barriers that prevent you from following his or her orders, and come up with solutions to overcome those barriers.
- Tailor your medical routine to your daily routine and lifestyle. Create reminders for yourself to avoid forgetting to take medication, to get your daily exercise in or to check your insulin levels.



- Ask your pharmacist to send refill reminders via email, text or telephone.

You are already helping to improve your health literacy by reading this newsletter, and you are doing far better than average. Only 12% of adults have “proficient” health literacy according to the National Assessment of Adult

Literacy. In other words, nearly nine out of ten adults may lack the knowledge needed to manage their health and prevent disease. You're not alone. By ensuring you understand your doctor's order and personal health plan, you can improve your health and reduce unnecessary treatments and costs.

Recipe

Cauliflower popcorn

Ingredients

- 1 large head cauliflower, broken into small florets
- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 1/2 teaspoon garlic salt



Directions

1. Preheat oven to 400 degrees F (200 degrees C).
2. Whisk olive oil and garlic salt together in a large bowl; add cauliflower and toss to coat completely. Spread cauliflower out onto a baking sheet.
3. Bake in the preheated oven until golden and tender, 15 to 18 minutes.

Source: Allrecipes.com