

# The **SHARE** Approach Health Literacy and Shared Decision Making

## Workshop Curriculum: Tool 4

The SHARE Approach is a five-step model, curriculum, and toolkit for shared decision making developed by the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality. The SHARE Approach aims to help healthcare professionals work with patients to explore and compare healthcare options through meaningful dialogue about what matters most to the patient and to make the best possible healthcare decisions.

Most patients want the best information available to make treatment decisions.<sup>1,2</sup> Yet, people with limited health literacy may be less likely to make the choices and take the actions needed to stay well.<sup>3</sup> Health literacy is the degree to which people can obtain, process, and understand the basic health information and services they need to make appropriate health decisions.

This handout can help you learn about health literacy challenges in the United States and find ways to better communicate with your patients during shared decision making.

### Limited Health Literacy

#### Limited health literacy can hinder shared decision making.

The vast majority (nearly 90 percent) of American adults lack full health literacy.<sup>4</sup> Limited health literacy makes it hard to read, listen to, talk about, and evaluate health information.

#### Limited health literacy can make it harder for patients to<sup>5,6</sup>:

- Comply with their treatment plan.
- Fill out complex forms.
- Find providers and services.
- Share their health history.
- Understand risk and probability.



## Limited health literacy leads to poor health outcomes.

### People with limited health literacy are more likely to<sup>5,6</sup>:

- Be hospitalized or visit the emergency room.
- Have trouble managing a chronic illness.
- Skip needed tests.
- Underuse preventive healthcare.

## Some groups are at higher risk of limited health literacy.

### People with limited health literacy are more likely to<sup>7</sup>:

- Be older adults.
- Have a chronic illness.
- Have a low income level.
- Identify as a racial or ethnic minority.
- Lack a high school degree or GED.
- Speak English as a second language.

However, people from all walks of life can have limited health literacy.

## Ways To Communicate Better With Your Patients

Use these techniques with **all** your patients, not just those who you think have limited health literacy. Any patient, especially when sick, frightened, or tired, can have trouble understanding health information. When it comes to shared decision making, clearer is better.

### Check off the strategies you will try when presenting decision aids:

- Check that the decision aids are understandable and actionable using the Patient Education Materials Assessment Tool (PEMAT): <http://www.ahrq.gov/professionals/prevention-chronic-care/improve/self-mgmt/pemat/index.html>.
- Speak slowly in a caring voice.
- Use plain language and avoid medical jargon.
- Personalize print decision aids by circling or highlighting key information and asking your patients to write their name on the educational tool.
- Make sure to explain health numbers presented in decision aids in a way that is meaningful to your patient. Refer to [Communicating Numbers to Your Patients: A Reference Guide for Healthcare Providers](#) (Tool 5).

- Make sure you present the information in a way your patient understands. Ask your patients to explain to you, in their own words, what you said to them. Refer to [Using the Teach-Back Technique: A Reference Guide for Healthcare Providers](#) (Tool 6).
- Offer a qualified medical interpreter to patients who have language or hearing barriers. Refer to [Overcoming Communication Barriers With Your Patients: A Guide for Healthcare Providers](#) (Tool 3).

### **Clear communication is key to shared decision making.**

Communicating well with your patients opens the door to shared decision making. That’s because patients need information they understand in order to make an informed choice. Shared decision making helps patients take charge of their care.

## **More Information About Health Literacy**

For health literacy information and resources from the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, visit the Health Literacy website at <https://www.ahrq.gov/health-literacy/index.html>.

## **References**

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This tool is to be used in conjunction with the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality's SHARE Approach workshop. To learn more about this workshop, [visit www.ahrq.gov/shareddecisionmaking](http://www.ahrq.gov/shareddecisionmaking).



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