

HEALTH LITERACY: A KEY TO UNDERSTANDING AND USING HEALTH INFORMATION



THE NATIONAL CENTER ON
Health

Tips for Families from the Head Start National Center on Health

Understanding What Your Doctor Tells You

Health literacy is how well you understand health information and make good choices about health and medical care.

Why Is It Important?

Many people find it hard to understand the health information they need to take care of themselves and their families.

When Parents and Caregivers Understand Health Information and How to Use it, Children Are More Likely to:

- Miss fewer days of school
- Make fewer trips to the pediatrician or the emergency room that are not needed

- Live healthier lives
- Get preventive care like flu shots
- Have a safe home where fewer accidents happen

Learning Ways to Understand and Use Health Information Can Help With:

- Talking with your doctor
- Asking questions
- Following a doctor's directions
- Taking or giving medicine the right way
- Getting needed medical tests and care
- Knowing what to do when your child gets sick
- Preventing diseases like diabetes, asthma, cancer
- Making healthy choices for you and your family
- Asking for help

Things You Can Do to Help Your Child

- **ASK** for help if you do not understand a health form or do not know how to fill it out.
- **ASK** for handouts in the language that is easiest for you to read.
- **WRITE DOWN** questions you have before you go on any health care visit.
- **TELL YOUR DOCTOR** if you do not understand what he or she is saying.
- Go to the library and ask how to find accurate information about your health concerns and medicines.

- Ask your Head Start program for information on health issues that concern you.
- Go to health workshops at your child's Head Start program and in your community.

