



HEALTH AWARENESS

Strategies For Improving Your Health Literacy

(NAPSA)—Understanding your prescription labels is just one example of how important it is to improve your health literacy.

Learning how to better communicate with your health care professional is perhaps the most important way to improve your health literacy.

“Understanding medicine’s peculiar terminology and instructions can be difficult for even the most educated patient,” says William B. Applegate, M.D., MPH, FACP, Chair, American College of Physicians (ACP) Foundation, which strives to improve the health and welfare of patients and society through initiatives that provide patients with the information they need to understand and manage their health.

“It can be nearly impossible,” adds Applegate, “for the millions who have difficulty reading, aren’t fluent in English, or have age-related vision or cognitive problems.”

It’s important to create a basic plan before meeting with your doctor of internal medicine (internist). Before your appointment, make a list of:

- your symptoms, which might include pain, fever, a lump or bump, unexplained weight gain or loss, change in energy level, difficulty sleeping, or feelings such as confusion or sadness

- your medications, including prescription drugs, over-the-counter (nonprescription) drugs, vitamins, herbal remedies or supplements, laxatives and eyedrops

- any assistive devices such as canes, walkers, scooters, hearing aids, reachers, grab bars and stair lifts.

When listing symptoms, be specific. The list should include:



According to a 2006 study published in *Annals of Internal Medicine*, 46 percent of adults misunderstand at least one prescription container label.

- what the symptom is
- when it started
- what time of day it happens and how long it lasts
- how often it happens
- anything that makes it worse or better
- anything it prevents you from doing.

A physical exam and medical tests provide important information, but it is your symptoms that point your internist in the right direction. After your diagnosis, ask your internist to write down information about treatment choices.

Ask your internist about the benefits and risks of each treatment option, such as what side effects may occur, how long the treatment would take and how likely it is that the treatment would work for you. If you do not like any of the options, ask if there are other choices.

For more information about health literacy and tips for managing chronic conditions, visit www.foundation.acponline.org.