

Improving Health Literacy

Tips and tools for healthy homes professionals

Stacy Robison, MPH, MCHES

Xanthi Scrimgeour, MHEd, MCHES



Today's Objectives

1. Demonstrate a basic understanding of key health literacy concepts.
2. Identify specific ways to integrate health literacy into your work as a healthy homes professional.
3. Communicate the importance of health literacy to colleagues and community partners.

Agenda

- + What is health literacy and why is it important for health and housing professionals?
- + Strategies for improving health literacy
 - Print materials and written information
 - Verbal communication
 - Web sites
- + Wrap-up

What is health literacy?

Health literacy is the degree to which individuals have the capacity to **obtain**, **process**, and **understand** basic health information and services needed to make appropriate health **decisions**.

The short answer

Health literacy is the ability to understand and use health information in everyday life.

What Factors Affect Health Literacy?

- + Communication skills
- + Knowledge of health-related topics
- + Culture
- + Language
- + Literacy and numeracy skills
- + Age
- + Computer access and skills
- + Pain, illness, and stress

Why is it important?

Health Literacy affects people's ability to:

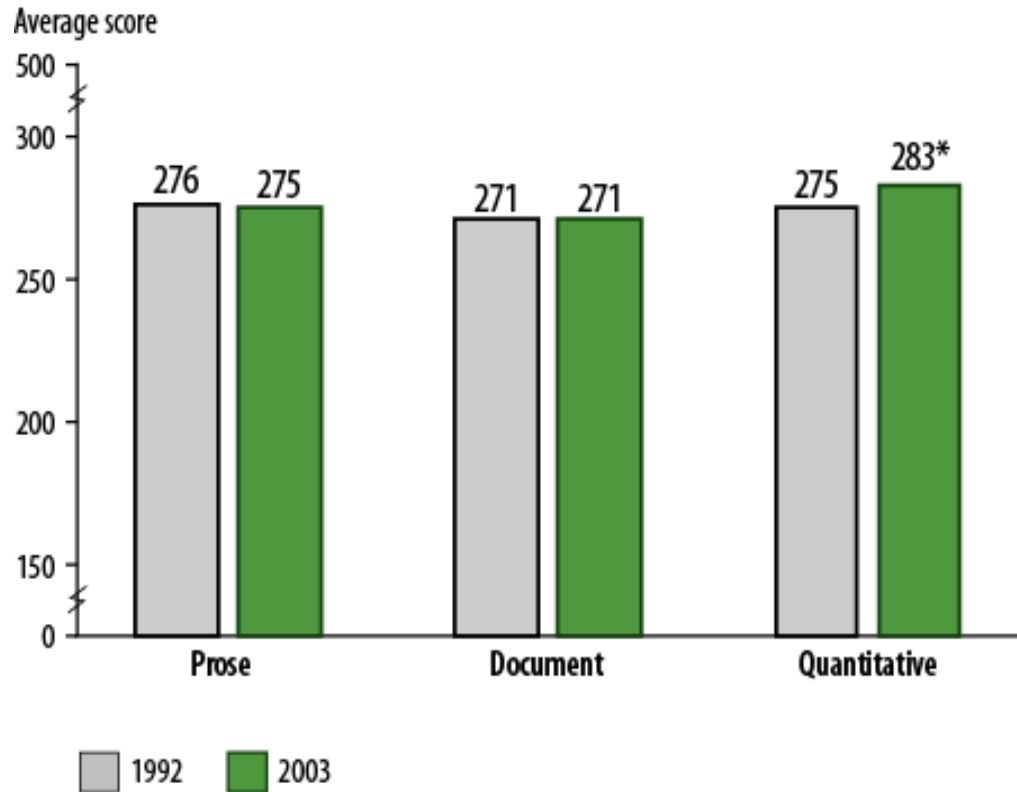
- + Navigate the public health system, including locating information and services and filling out forms
- + Share personal and health information with professionals
- + Engage in self-care and disease management
- + Understand concepts like probability and risk

The Numbers

- + Approximately 1 in 2 adults struggle with literacy
- + Nearly 9 in 10 adults struggle with health literacy

Source: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, 2003 National Assessment of Adult Literacy.

Change in Adult Literacy: 1992-2003



Source: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, 1992 National Adult Literacy Survey and 2003 National Assessment of Adult Literacy.

Adults with Below Basic Health Literacy

Characteristic	Percent in <i>Below Basic</i> population	Percent in total population
Did not graduate from high school	51	15
Did not speak English before starting school	39	13
Adults reporting poor health	10	4
Hispanic adults	35	12
Age 65+	31	15
No medical insurance	36	18
Did not obtain health information over the Internet ¹	80	43
Black adults	19	12
One or more disabilities ²	48	30

Source: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, 2003 National Assessment of Adult Literacy

The Bottom Line

- + Most adults lack the skills needed to manage their health and prevent disease, such as:
 - Understanding a drug label
 - Using a body mass index (BMI) graph to find a healthy weight range

Neighbor Nudge

- + What skills and knowledge are needed to maintain a healthy home?
(What do we *assume* people know how to do?)

- + In your experience, what healthy homes information and/or tasks do people struggle with the most?

Disparities

Often people with the greatest health burdens have the least access to information, communication technologies, health care, and supporting social services.

Average health literacy increases with each...

- + higher level of educational attainment
- + percent increase above the poverty threshold
- + higher level of self-reported health

Source: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, 1992 National Adult Literacy Survey and 2003 National Assessment of Adult Literacy.

Limited Health Literacy

The realities of working with people with limited health literacy:

- ✓ Silence
- ✓ Shame
- ✓ Limited Participation/exclusion
- ✓ Lost Entitlements
- ✓ Lost Rights
- ✓ Compromised Health Care
- ✓ Compromised Health

Access to health information is a basic right.

Members of minority groups who are poor, lack resources, and have less than a high school education are likely to have limited literacy skills. This may increase disparities in health.

The Flip Side

Poorly designed health materials and services create unnecessary communication barriers that violate rights and contribute to disparities.

3 Strategies for Improving Health Literacy

1. Simplify written health information.
2. Communicate clearly with the public.
3. Create usable health Web sites.

Strategy 1

Simplify written health information

Simplify Written Information

1. Define the behavioral objective – what do you want the reader to do?
2. Organize this information into clearly defined action steps.
3. Use plain language.
4. Pay attention to layout and design.
5. Pre-test.

Neighbor Nudge

What makes **prevention** information unique?

Getting to Action

Attitudes/Beliefs



Action

- + Do people think they are at risk?
- + How do people perceive the benefits of the behavior?
(Are the benefits relevant/important to them?)
- + Do they believe the action will reduce their risk?
- + What are people's perceived barriers to taking action?
- + Do they think they can do it? (self efficacy)



Writing Tips: Basics

- + Start with the behavioral recommendation.

E.g. If you live in an older home, take steps to protect your family from lead poisoning.

- + Describe the behavior.

E.g. Keep kids and pregnant women away from chipping or peeling paint.

- + Make the case without being overly negative.

E.g. Preventing lead poisoning is important for young children because their bodies are still growing. They are more sensitive to the harmful effects of lead.



Writing Tips: Basics cont'd

- + Address common concerns/questions.

E.g. What if I rent my home?

- + Describe risk factors/prevalence.

E.g. 1 out of every 15 homes has a dangerous level of radon.

- + Try not to sound “preachy” – avoid “should” and “don’t”

Writing Tips: Benefits

- + Describe the long-term health benefits of the behavior.

E.g. A few minutes now could save your child's life.

- + Describe “lifestyle” benefits.

E.g. Making your own non-toxic cleaners will save you money.

Writing Tips: Take Action

- + Break behavior into steps. Choose a simple first step.

E.g. Check to see if there is a smoke alarm in each bedroom and on the ceiling outside bedroom doors.

- + Address cost whenever possible. Include links to low-cost care.

Using Plain Language

Plain language is a strategy for making written and oral communication easier to understand.

Key elements of plain language include:

- + Use simple language and define technical terms.
- + Use an active voice.
- + Break complex information into short chunks.
- + Put the most important information first.

Plain Language Warm-up

What could we try instead of the following:

- + Indoor mold growth can and should be prevented or controlled by controlling moisture indoors.
- + Radon is a form of ionizing radiation and a proven carcinogenic.

Fun with Plain Language!

+ Practice

Layout and Design

- + Leave plenty of white space on the page.
- + Use at least 12 point font.
- + Use **bold face** instead of CAPITALS and *italics*.
- + Use visuals that communicate your message.

Before and After

TEMPORARY WAYS TO KEEP CHILDREN SAFE FROM LEAD PAINT HAZARDS

Under the Lead Law, the property owner is responsible for having his or her home delisted or brought under interim control if it was built before 1978 and a child under the age of six lives there. Delisting permanently reduces the risk of lead poisoning. Until delisting occurs, here are some temporary ways to reduce lead hazards:

- 1. Clean often**
Wet wiping regularly reduces lead dust levels in the home. See other side.
- 2. Put duct tape or contact paper over peeling paint and plaster**
Put duct tape or contact paper on window wells, window sills, walls or other surfaces with peeling paint or plaster. Clean these areas often. Window wells and sills can be cleaned more easily when contact paper or duct tape are put down first. See other side.
- 3. Keep the lower part of the window closed (if possible)**
If a window well is in bad condition, keep the lower part of the window closed and open only the upper part. This will prevent your children from putting their hands or objects in the window well where the lead dust collects. It also helps keep lead dust from blowing into the house.
- 4. Move furniture to block contact with peeling paint and plaster**
By moving a sofa in front of a crack in a wall, you can block a child's access to lead hazards. Never place furniture where a child may climb on it and fall out of a window.
- 5. Change child's bedroom (if possible)**
If your child's bedroom has chipping paint or plaster, consider using another room without chipping paint for the bedroom.
- 6. Other ideas**
Regularly have your child tested for lead poisoning; wash your child's hands and toys often; if you are renovating or repainting call CLPPP for more information on how to do the work safely before you begin; feed your child food high in iron, calcium, and vitamin C and low in fat.

Lead poisoning and your child's health

Lead paint is the most common cause of childhood lead poisoning. When old paint cracks or peels, or when lead-painted surfaces rub against each other or are bumped, lead paint dust or chips are created. Children typically become poisoned by putting their fingers (which have touched lead dust) into their mouths. Lead poisoning can cause lasting damage to children's brains, kidneys, and nervous systems. Even lower levels of lead can slow children's development and cause learning and behavioral problems. Children under age six are at greatest risk.

Keep your child safe

Remember, these are only temporary ways to reduce the risk of lead poisoning from lead paint hazards. The only permanent way to reduce the risk of lead poisoning is to have the home delisted. The owner of a home built before 1978 is responsible for having it delisted or brought under interim control when a child under the age of six lives there.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT:
Massachusetts Department of Public Health
Bureau of Environmental Health Assessment
Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention Program
250 Washington Street
Seventh Floor
Boston, MA 02116
1-800-532-9571 (toll free)
www.mass.gov/dph/clhpp

or your local lead program at:

Keep Children Away from Lead Paint

Cover loose paint.

Use contact paper or duct tape to cover loose paint in and around windows and walls.



Block access to lead paint.

- Move furniture in front of peeling paint or plaster.
- Never place furniture where a child may climb on it and fall out of a window.
- Keep the lower part of the window closed. Open only the upper part, if you can.
- Change your child's bedroom. If your child's bedroom has chipping paint, use another room.

Renovate safely.

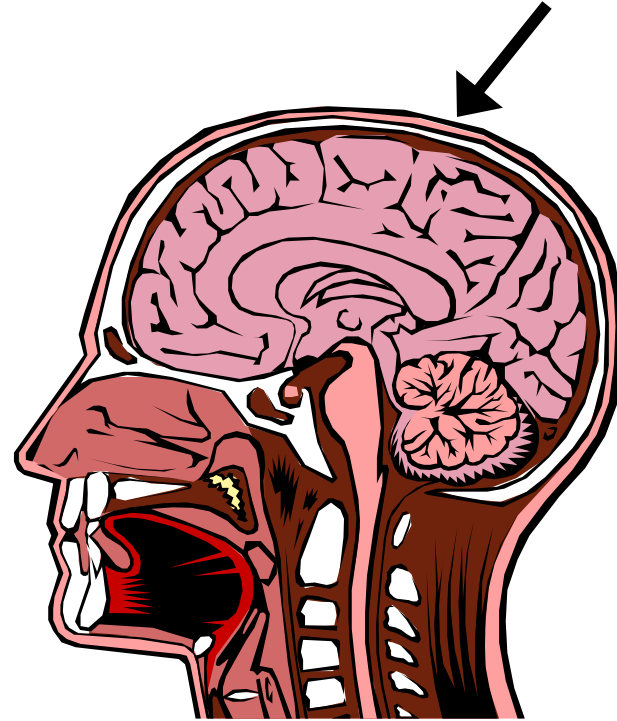
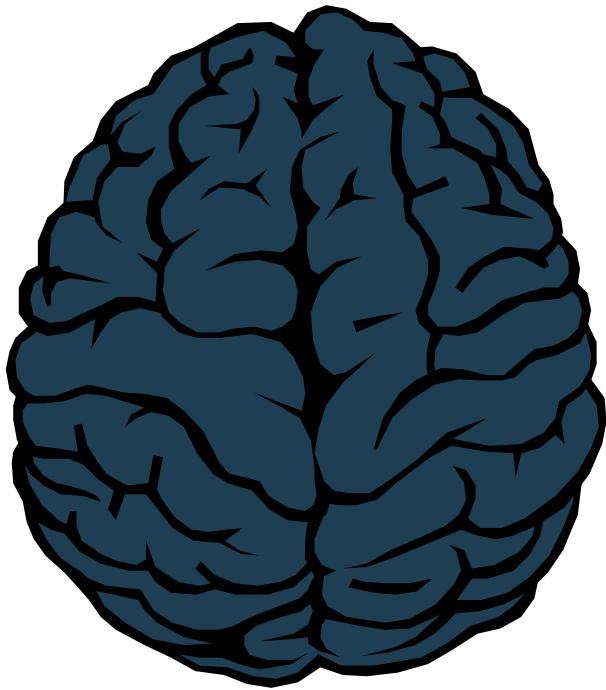
- Do not do any remodeling or repair work until your home has been inspected for lead.
- To learn more about lead-safe work practices, call CLPPP.

Be Careful!

Home repairs like sanding or scraping paint can make dangerous lead dust.



Place visuals in context



Evaluating plain language

No one technique defines plain language.

Rather, plain language is defined by results: it is easy to read, understand, and use.

Strategy 2

Communicate clearly with the public

Ask Open-ended Questions

- + Use words like “what” and “how” when you ask questions.

Example: Tell me about the problem. What may have caused it?

- + Avoid asking YES or NO questions.

Example: What questions do you have?

Check for Understanding

- + Make sure your messages are understood and remembered.
- + Tips:
 - + Summarize what the person needs to do.
 - + Use a handout written in plain language.

Universal Precautions Approach



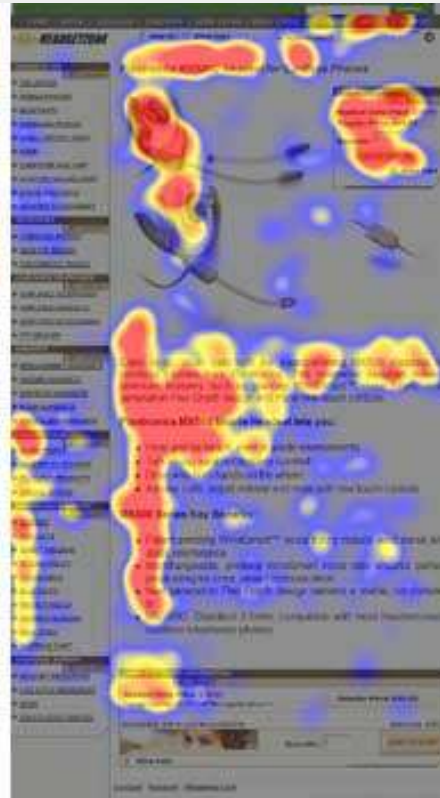
Use plain, everyday language for **all** communication.

Strategy 3

Create usable health Web sites

Why design usable Web sites?

- + Simple navigation and clear content can help adults with limited literacy skills find, understand, and use health information on a Web site.
- + More often than not, it's poorly designed Web sites – more than limited literacy skills – that contribute to users' challenges online.



Nielson Norman Group

Typical F pattern

Characteristics of Web users with limited literacy skills

1. Skipping instead of scanning
2. Difficulty searching
3. Narrow field of view
4. Easily overwhelmed
5. Limited working memory
6. Prefer simple navigation

Source: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion. (2010). Health literacy online: A guide to writing and designing easy-to-use health Web sites. Washington, DC: Author.



Manage Stress



e-mail



print

QUICK GUIDE MAIN MENU

Overview

The Basics

Take Action

The Basics

Learning how to manage stress can help prevent serious health problems such as heart disease, depression, and high blood pressure.



Take Action!

The first step is to notice when you are feeling stressed. Look out for warning signs of stress – such as tension in your neck and shoulders.

Content last updated on: June 1, 2009

Content Review

Start Today: Small Steps

- Take a few slow, deep breaths.
- Take a hot shower or bath.
- Talk to a friend or loved one about how you are feeling.

Want More Information?



Find Services Near You

Learn how to [eat healthy](#) and [get active](#) to manage stress. Learn more about how you can lower your risk of [heart disease](#).

Find [additional resources](#) from healthfinder.gov.

Manage Stress



▶ QUICK GUIDE MAIN MENU

Overview

The Basics

Take Action



Page: **1** 2 3 4 ▶

The Basics

You can prevent or lessen stress by:

- Planning ahead
- Preparing for stressful events

Some stress is hard to avoid. You can find ways to manage stress by:

- Taking time to relax
- Getting active and eating healthy
- Talking to friends and family

Start Today: Small Steps

- Take a few slow, deep breaths.
- Take a hot shower or bath.
- Talk to a friend or loved one about how you are feeling.

Want More Information?



Find Services Near You

Learn how to [eat healthy](#) and [get active](#) to manage stress. Learn more about how you can lower your risk of [heart disease](#).

Find [additional resources](#) from [healthfinder.gov](#).

Whenever possible, use **bulleted lists** and short sentences.

Limit text to 3 lines.

Use clear **stand-alone headings and sections** that function independently.

Layout:

- Use familiar font in at least 12 points.
- Use white space and avoid clutter.

 **MedlinePlus**
Trusted Health Information for You

A service of the U.S. National Library of Medicine
NIH National Institutes of Health

[Home](#) [About MedlinePlus](#) [Site Map](#) [FAQs](#) [Contact Us](#) Search MedlinePlus **GO**

Health Topics **Drugs & Supplements** **Videos & Cool Tools** **ESPAÑOL**

Other Topics: [A](#) [B](#) [C](#) [D](#) [E](#) [F](#) [G](#) [H](#) [I](#) [J](#) [K](#) [L](#) [M](#) [N](#) [O](#) [P](#) [Q](#) [R](#) [S](#) [T](#) [U](#) [V](#) [W](#) [XYZ](#) [All Topics](#)

Latex Allergy

Latex is a milky fluid that comes from the tropical rubber tree. Hundreds of everyday products contain latex. Repeated exposure to a protein in natural latex can make you more likely to develop a latex allergy. If your immune system detects the protein, a reaction can start in minutes. You could get a rash, asthma and in rare cases shock from latex exposure.

Latex products are all around you. Some common ones are

- Gloves
- Condoms
- Balloons
- Rubber bands
- Shoe soles
- Pacifiers

If you are allergic to latex, it is a good idea to learn which products contain it. That way, you can reduce your exposure. The most common reactions are to gloves and condoms. Latex-free alternatives exist for both.

Get Latex Allergy updates by email **GO** [what's this?](#)

Start Here

- [Tips to Remember: Latex Allergy](#) (American Academy of Allergy, Asthma, and Immunology)

[Print](#) [Email](#) [Share](#)



Related Topics

- [Allergy](#)
- [Immune System](#)

National Institutes of Health

The primary NIH organization for research on [Latex Allergy](#) is the [National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases](#)

[Basics](#) [Learn More](#) [Multimedia & Cool Tools](#)

Create a simple and engaging **homepage**.

The image shows a screenshot of the Planned Parenthood website homepage. The layout is organized into several sections:

- Header:** The top left features the "PLANNED PARENTHOOD" logo in white on a blue background. The top right has links for "HOME" and "EN ESPAÑOL".
- Navigation:** Below the logo is an orange bar with three menu items: "HEALTH INFO & SERVICES", "GET INVOLVED", and "ABOUT US".
- Hero Section:** A large image of a hand writing on a notepad. The text on the notepad reads: "Dear Members of Congress, Please don't take away my birth control." Below this image is a blue box with the text "STAND WITH PLANNED PARENTHOOD" and "Tell Congress that Planned Parenthood needs federal funding for birth control, cancer screenings, HIV testing, and other lifesaving care." A "TAKE ACTION" button is located at the bottom right of this box.
- Right Sidebar:** A blue vertical sidebar on the right contains:
 - Buttons for "TAKE ACTION »" and "DONATE »".
 - A "FIND A HEALTH CENTER" section with a search form: "Zip Code OR State" with a dropdown arrow and a "GO" button.
 - A "THE FACTS ON" section with a list of topics: "Abortion", "Birth Control", "Morning After Pill", and "Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs)". A "MORE HEALTH TOPICS »" link is below the list.
 - A "Site Search" box with a "GO" button.
- Service Tiles:** Below the hero section are three white tiles with images and text:
 - FIND A PLANNED PARENTHOOD HEALTH CENTER NEAR YOU:** Includes an image of two women and a "LEARN MORE »" link.
 - MORNING-AFTER PILL:** Includes an image of three women and the text "Accidents happen — that's why we have emergency contraception." with a "LEARN MORE »" link.
 - WE'LL HELP YOU FIND OUT:** Includes an image with a question mark and the text "am i pregnant?" with a "GET STARTED »" link.
- Bottom Right:** A white sidebar on the right contains three links: "INFO FOR TEENS »", "TOOLS FOR PARENTS »", and "TOOLS FOR EDUCATORS »".



Ready

Prepare. Plan. Stay Informed.




Ready America.


Ready Business.


Ready Kids.



Looking For
Disaster
Response
Information?

Interested
In
Getting
Involved?

KNOW
What to Do About the Flu

www.flu.gov 

01 02 03 04

+

Keep key content **above the fold**.

The screenshot shows the top portion of the Kaiser Permanente website. At the top left is the Kaiser Permanente logo. To its right are links for 'Home kp.org' and 'Guía en español', followed by a search bar labeled 'Search our site'. Below this is a green navigation bar with tabs for 'My health manager', 'Health & wellness', 'Health plans & services', and 'Locate our services'. The main content area features a 'Members sign on' section with fields for 'User ID' and 'Password', a 'Sign on' button, and links for 'Forgot your user ID or password?' and 'Register to get a user ID'. To the right of the sign-in section is a large image of two smiling children. Below the navigation bar is a row of icons and labels for 'Prospective Members', 'Employers/Administrators', 'Media Representatives', 'Brokers', and 'Job Seekers'.

Important notices

Learn about [health care reform](#) in action.

We're remodeling our website: You may notice sections that look different as we phase in improvements.



Health and wellness

Protect yourself and your family: [Get vaccinated for flu and whooping cough.](#)

Healthy moves

Pumping iron isn't your thing? Step your way into shape with [Every Body Walk!](#)

Patient safety: [11 ways you can help](#)

From screening to treatment: [cancer resources](#)

- [Featured health topics](#)
- [Health classes](#)
- [Healthy lifestyle programs](#)
- [Health topics A to Z](#)
- [La guía en español](#)
- [More...](#)



Health plans and services

A perfect match of choice and price: [Apply for coverage.](#)

Plans for peace of mind

[Losing your coverage?](#) We can help.

Explore [individual and family plans.](#)

Get covered: Check out our [plans for current and retired federal employees.](#)

[Get information on our Medicare plans.](#)

Now that we've found each other

[New member, meet Kaiser Permanente.](#)

[Still undecided? Watch a video on how our health plan](#)



The screenshot shows a web browser window with the URL <http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/weightcontrol.html>. The browser's back button is circled in green. The page header includes the MedlinePlus logo and the text "A service of the U.S. National Library of Medicine NIH National Institutes of Health". Navigation links include "Home" (circled in green), "About MedlinePlus", "Site Map", "FAQs", and "Contact Us". A search bar is labeled "Search MedlinePlus" with a "GO" button. A horizontal menu contains "Health Topics" (with a green arrow pointing to it), "Drugs & Supplements", "Videos & Cool Tools", and "ESPAÑOL". Below this is a "Other Topics" section with an alphabetical index from A to Z and "All Topics". The main content area is titled "Weight Control" and contains a text block about overweight individuals, a list of tips, and a photograph of a person's feet on a scale. The text block reads: "If you are overweight, you are not alone. Sixty-six percent of adults in the U.S. are overweight or obese. Achieving a healthy weight can help you control your cholesterol, blood pressure and blood sugar. It might also help you prevent weight-related diseases, such as heart disease, diabetes, arthritis and some cancers. Eating too much or not being physically active enough will make you overweight. To maintain your weight, the calories you eat must equal the energy you burn. To lose weight, you must use more calories than you eat. A weight-control strategy might include

- Choosing low-fat, low-calorie foods
- Eating smaller portions

Navigation icons for "Print", "Email", and "Share" are located above the photograph.

Create easy access to **home** and **menu** pages.
Make sure the “**Back**” button works.

Engage users. Make it **interactive**.

Home & News | Health A-Z | Drugs & Supplements | Healthy Living | Eating & Diet | Parenting & Pregnancy | **New!** Teen Health | Pet Health

March 14, 2011

WebMD
Better information. Better health.

Log In | Register

WebMD Community
Experts and Others Like You

Find us on: f t

Other search tools: Symptoms | Doctors

Health Conditions & Communities

- ADHD
- Allergies
- Anxiety Disorders
- Arthritis
- Asthma
- Back Pain
- Bipolar Disorder
- Breast Cancer
- Cancer
- Cholesterol
- Cold & Flu
- COPD
- Depression
- Diabetes
- Fibromyalgia
- Heart Disease
- Heartburn/GERD
- Hypertension

Get to Know Fibro

The hallmark of fibromyalgia is muscle pain throughout the body. See all the symptoms and who's at risk.

[View Slideshow](#)

Don't Look Old
You can reduce sagging skin and age spots.

Adult ADHD
Are these symptoms affecting you?

Fibromyalgia
See all the symptoms and who's at risk.

Sleep Myths & Facts

If you cut back on the sleep you need by just one hour, your body will adjust.

True False

[Get Answer](#)

ADVERTISEMENT

Find out more about our formula

Gerber

[Go to Gerber.com](#)

ALL users benefit from improved usability

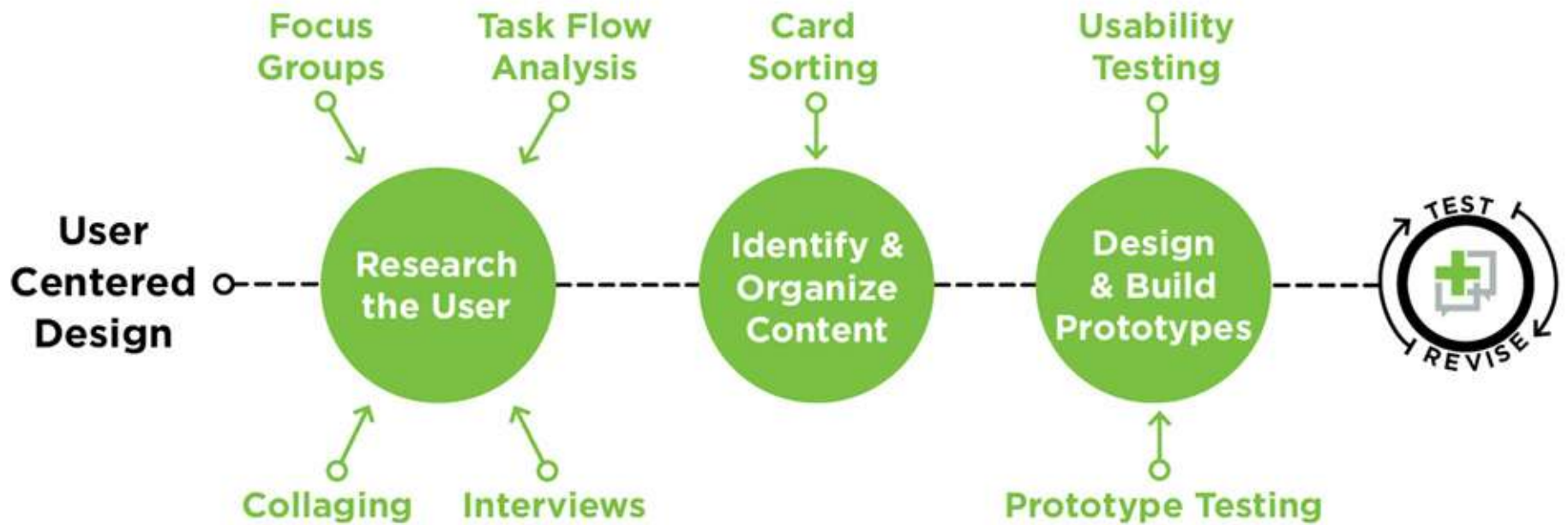
Prototype Web site (designed to support users with limited literacy skills) as compared to original site

Time on Task (Mean)	Original Site	Prototype	Improvement
High literacy	14:19	5:05	+182%
Lower literacy	22:16	9:30	+134%
All users	17:50	6:45	+164%
Satisfaction (Mean)	Original Site	Prototype	Improvement
High literacy	3.73	4.58	+23%
Lower literacy	3.54	4.38	+24%
All users	3.67	4.51	+23%

High Literacy Users:

3x as fast with the revised site

93% success rate on revised site (compared to 68% with original)



Main Point



You can be an advocate for improving health literacy.

Get Started

1. Incorporate health literacy into staff training and orientation.
2. Require all materials, forms, and written information be in plain language.
3. Incorporate health literacy improvement into program goals, objectives, and strategic plans.
4. Include health literacy in grants and contracts.

What will you do?

Thank You!!

Contact Information:

+ Stacy Robison

stacy@communicatehealth.com

+ Xanthi Scrimgeour

xanthi@communicatehealth.com

www.communicatehealth.com