

FDA

**U.S. FOOD & DRUG  
ADMINISTRATION**

OFFICE OF MINORITY HEALTH AND HEALTH EQUITY

## *Bridging the Gap to Address Health Literacy Needs Among Diverse Groups*

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No conflicts of interest to declare





# OMHHE Focus Areas

Research and Collaboration

Outreach and Communication

Stakeholder Engagement

Professional Development Training



# Health Literacy



Health literacy results from the match between the health information and services created for the public and people's capacity to find, understand, and use them.

## Affects ability to:

- Make well informed decisions about your health
- Get the medical care you need
- Take your medicines correctly
- Manage a disease
- Lead a healthy lifestyle

# Limited Health Literacy

Only **12%** of adults have proficient health literacy

- Reasons for **limited health literacy**
- Use of words that consumers don't understand
  - Low educational skills
  - Cultural barriers to health care
  - Limited English proficiency

Linked to higher **hospitalization rates**, less frequent use of **health care services**, and poorer chronic disease **self-management** and **treatment adherence**

# Health Literacy and Health Equity

- Limited health literacy is more likely among members of racial/ethnic minority and other diverse groups
- Health literacy issues are compounded for consumers whose primary language is not English
- Improving health literacy is a critical part of closing the health equity gap

# FDA's Health Literacy Efforts

Using plain language for clear communication

Testing materials & engaging intended audience

Simplifying numeracy  
(e.g., natural frequency expressions v percentages)

Translating materials

Creating tailored initiatives

# Health Literacy Resources

## HEALTH LITERACY FDA

**Fact Sheet**

Health literacy is the ability to find, understand, and use health information to protect you or your loved one's health. Low health literacy is a barrier to achieving health equity.

*Office of Minority Health and Health Equity*

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**What is health literacy?**

Health literacy is the degree to which a person can find, understand, and use information and services to inform health-related decisions and actions for themselves and others. It affects your ability to:

- Make informed decisions about your health
- Get the medical care you need
- Take your medications correctly
- Manage a disease
- Adopt a healthy lifestyle

**Why is health literacy important?**

Low health literacy is linked to poorer health, increased use of health care services, and greater difficulty in following treatment instructions, including medication misuse. Members of racial/ethnic minority and other diverse groups, older adults, and those with low socioeconomic status are more likely to have lower levels of health literacy. This means that low health literacy is a barrier to achieving health equity, which is when everyone has the opportunity to be as healthy as possible.

**Asking questions is the first step**

Everyone is at risk for misunderstanding health information if the topic is complex or affects our emotions. Asking questions and making sure you understand the answers is a critical part of taking charge of your health. It also helps your health care team to better understand your experiences and concerns. Examples of questions to ask include:

- What is the test for?
- When will I get the results?
- Why do I need this treatment?
- Are there any alternatives?
- What are the possible complications?



Health literacy involves a combination of reading, listening, and decision-making skills. These skills are used for health-related activities such as:

- Following written or spoken instructions on how to take medications
- Discussing health concerns and symptoms with a health care provider
- Understanding medical advice and treatment directions given by a health care provider or pharmacist
- Searching the internet for health information from trustworthy websites

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## UNDERSTANDING HEALTH LITERACY



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## WHAT IS HEALTH LITERACY? FDA U.S. FOOD & DRUG ADMINISTRATION

*Health literacy is the ability to find, understand, and use health information to protect you or your loved one's health.*

**Health literacy affects your ability to:**



Make informed decisions about your health



Take your medications correctly



Get the medical care you need



Manage a disease or condition



Adopt a healthy lifestyle

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**Health literacy skills are used for activities such as:**



Asking questions about your health issues, treatment options, or care



Discussing your health concerns and symptoms with a health care provider



Understanding medical advice and treatment directions given by a health care provider or pharmacist



Following written or spoken instructions on how to take medications

For more information on health equity, visit [www.fda.gov/healthequity](https://www.fda.gov/healthequity)

# Using a Health Equity Lens to Improve the Drug Facts Label



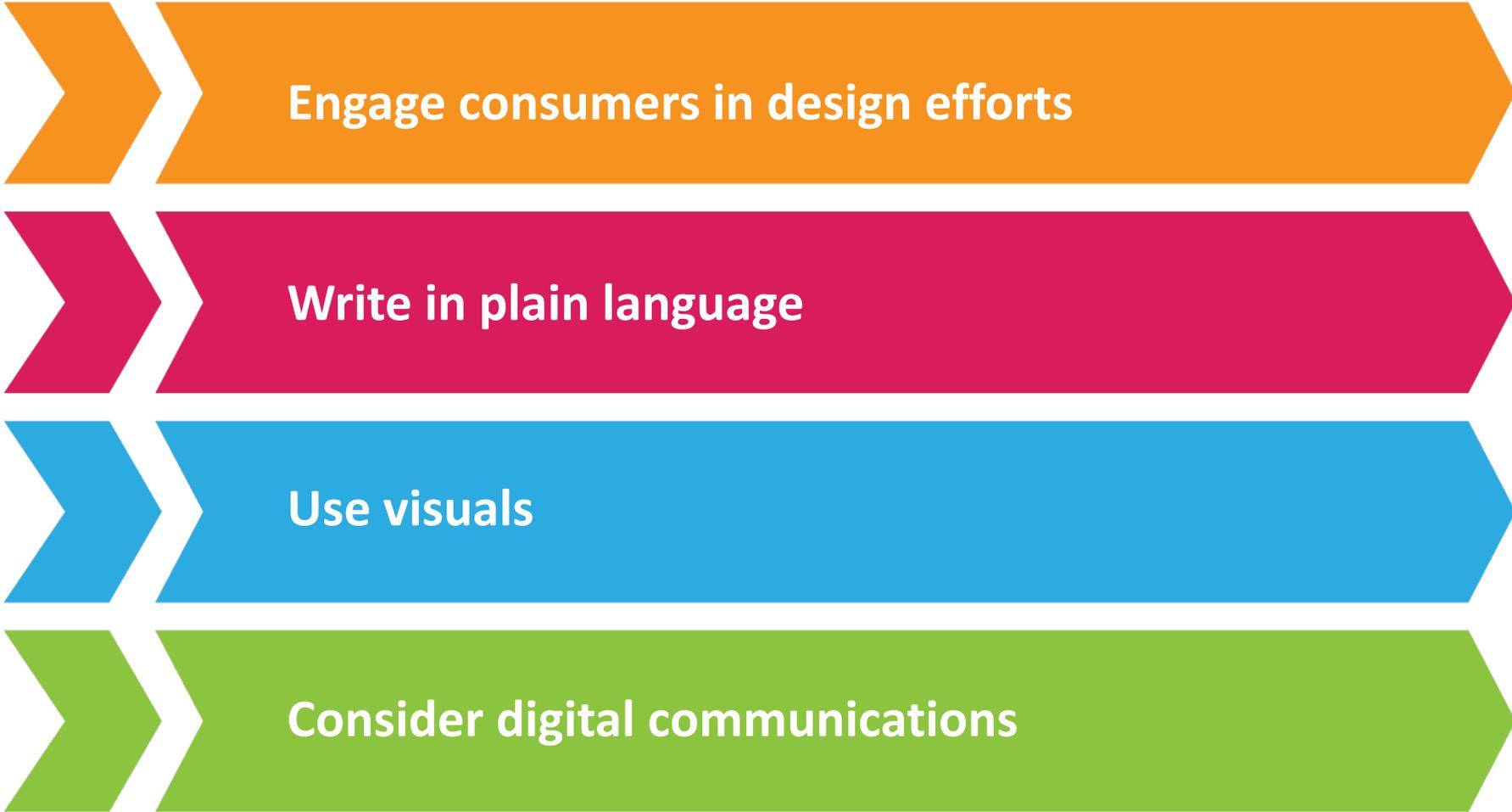
<b>Drug Facts</b>	
<b>Active ingredient (in each tablet)</b>	<b>Purpose</b>
Chlorpheniramine maleate 2 mg.....	Antihistamine
<b>Uses</b> temporarily relieves these symptoms due to hay fever or other upper respiratory allergies: ■ sneezing ■ runny nose ■ itchy, watery eyes ■ itchy throat	
<b>Warnings</b>	
Ask a doctor before use if you have	
■ glaucoma ■ a breathing problem such as emphysema or chronic bronchitis	
■ trouble urinating due to an enlarged prostate gland	
Ask a doctor or pharmacist before use if you are taking tranquilizers or sedatives	
<b>When using this product</b>	
■ drowsiness may occur ■ avoid alcoholic drinks	
■ alcohol, sedatives, and tranquilizers may increase drowsiness	
■ be careful when driving a motor vehicle or operating machinery	
■ excitability may occur, especially in children	
If pregnant or breast-feeding, ask a health professional before use.	
Keep out of reach of children. In case of overdose, get medical help or contact a Poison Control Center right away.	
<b>Directions</b>	
adults and children 12 years and over	take 2 tablets every 4 to 6 hours; not more than 12 tablets in 24 hours
children 6 years to under 12 years	take 1 tablet every 4 to 6 hours; not more than 6 tablets in 24 hours
children under 6 years	ask a doctor

<b>Drug Facts (continued)</b>	▲
<b>Other information</b> ■ store at 20-25° C (68-77° F) ■ protect from excessive moisture	
<b>Inactive ingredients</b> D&C yellow no. 10, lactose, magnesium stearate, microcrystalline cellulose, pregelatinized starch	

# Questions to Ask

- Could proposed changes have a negative impact on some populations or communities? If so, how can the inequitable impacts be mitigated?
- How do we consider the needs of consumers with limited health literacy?
- How will proposed changes address issues of limited health literacy?

# Possible Strategies



Engage consumers in design efforts

Write in plain language

Use visuals

Consider digital communications

# Thank You!



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