Health Literacy, Preventive Health Care, and Healthy Lifestyles

Health Literacy Skills
- Increase a person’s ability to:
  - Understand health concepts
  - Share information with doctors
  - Make healthy choices
  - Engage in self-care and disease management

- Lower health literacy skills decrease a person’s ability to:
  - Understand health risks
  - Evaluate different treatment options
  - Follow health care recommendations

Health Literacy and Use of Preventive Care
- Better health prevention requires patients to have adequate health literacy skills
- People need to understand prevention information in order to follow it

- People with limited health literacy
  - Get fewer mammograms/Pap smears
  - Receive flu and pneumonia vaccines less often
  - Are less likely to take their children to well-child health visits
  - Get dental check ups for themselves and their children less

- More effective health prevention
  - Focused more on different literacy levels
  - Take steps to address patient’s native language

Health Literacy and Healthy Lifestyles
- Healthy lifestyle choices
  - Eating a healthy diet
  - Healthy weight maintenance
  - Regular exercise
  - Quitting smoking
  - Minimizing stress
Healthy Eating
  • Obese patients with low literacy
    ▪ Less likely to understand the effects of obesity
    ▪ Often don’t understand need to lose weight

According to former U.S. Surgeon General, Richard H. Carmona
  • Reducing obesity improves health literacy

People with limited health literacy
  • Unable to interpret nutritional information
  • Don’t understand the concept of caloric intake/expenditure

Health Literacy and Tobacco Use
  • Research
    ▪ Low literacy is a key predictor of tobacco use in adolescents (male and female)
    ▪ Low literacy was strongly associated with adults who smoke
    ▪ Low literacy patients who smoke are less likely to understand their risk of heart attack/stroke

  • Smoking education materials for:
    ▪ Low-income African American/Hispanic pregnancies
      ▪ Smoking cessation materials at a third-grade level lead to a higher rate of tobacco abstinence during & immediately following pregnancy

References