



# October Health Promotion Toolbox

## Health Literacy Month

### Message for Health Educators

Health literacy – the ability to obtain, process and understand basic health information – is critical to mission readiness for Sailors and Marines.<sup>1</sup> Those with accurate knowledge about the body and disease have a better understanding of the relationship between lifestyle choices and health outcomes. The National Assessment of Adult Literacy (NAAL) reports that only 11 percent of adults with military insurance (active or retired service members and their family members) are proficient in health literacy.<sup>1</sup> While this statistic is comparable to the U.S. adult civilian population (12 percent), it is no less alarming.<sup>1</sup> Limited health knowledge can have real consequences for Sailors and Marines such as incorrectly following dosing instructions on a prescription drug bottle to help quit tobacco or not understanding a standardized chart to determine adult immunization schedules.

As a health educator, you can support Sailors, Marines, beneficiaries, and DoD civilians by promoting and disseminating clear, retainable information about basic health information they need to improve their health and maintain medical readiness for military service. NMCPHC Health Promotion and Wellness Department is here to help by providing ready-to-use health literacy tools and resources you can access by clicking on the blue, underlined, hyperlinked text throughout the document. By circulating information about this critical topic, you will equip Sailors, Marines, beneficiaries, and DoD civilians with the resources they need to better navigate health care visits and make appropriate health decisions in between medical appointments. Increasing health knowledge is a means for them to enhance readiness, improve performance, and build resilience.

### What Can Health Educators Do?

**As health educators, you play an important role in promoting health literacy among Sailors, Marines, retirees, and family members:**

- Share this [medication interactions fact sheet](#) to inform Sailors, Marines, retirees, and family members about possible interactions between regular health maintenance medications, like multivitamins, and medication that is prescribed by a health care provider.



- Circulate this [infographic](#) with patients to let them know how to stay healthy in between health care visits. You can also share the infographic with other health care providers and staff to use with their patients.
- Help Sailors, Marines, and others navigate the web for accurate health information with the [Cut Through the Clutter: Find Health Info on the Web](#) fact sheet.
- Share [Four Tips on Talking to your Doctor for Better Health](#) so those you work with get the most out of their health care visits.
- Put these [simple tips](#) into practice in health-related discussions with Sailors, Marines, and others to help them better retain health information.
- Take this [online course](#) from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to better communicate health information to your audience.
- Learn [clear communication](#) tactics so patients leave your office feeling empowered by newfound knowledge about their health.
- Remember to avoid [medical jargon](#) and speak in plain language to reach patients more effectively.
- Participate in [National Health Education Week](#) from October 19-23, which is sponsored by the Society for Public Health Education, to learn what other organizations are doing to improve health literacy.
- Watch the American Medical Association's video, "[Health literacy and patient safety: Help patients understand](#)," to learn about topics patients have trouble understanding related to health and health care.
- Learn how to [effectively disseminate health literacy information](#) to Sailors, Marines, and others.
- Disseminate information on how to [better understand over the counter and prescription drug labels](#).

## References

<sup>1</sup>U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion. America's Health Literacy: Why We Need Accessible Health Information. <http://www.health.gov/communication/literacy/issuebrief/>. Published 2008. Accessed August 2015.