



Everyday health challenges

A person with limited literacy can face many problems in daily life, such as:

- following instructions for a diabetic diet
- giving the right amount of medicine to a sick child
- reading food labels
- mixing infant formula properly
- safely running kitchen appliances
- filling out medical forms
- finding a doctor or dentist
- understanding a consent form for medical treatment
- asking for and getting a referral to a specialist.

Improving access to health care and information on healthy living leads to a better quality of life. This creates a better environment for life long learning.

A healthy child can learn, think, respond and behave in a way that will make going to school a better experience.

Literacy and health

Health and literacy are critical resources for everyday living. Studies show that literacy is a key determinant of health. The opportunities, resources and ability to make good decisions about a healthy lifestyle may not be possible without basic literacy skills.

Fact

People with lower literacy skills are more likely to work and live in environments that may hurt their health.

Investing in literacy

- ◆ For people who may need health services the most, health information can be part of literacy programs.
- ◆ Improved literacy can help eliminate poverty. Poverty is a major factor in poor health.

Poverty and poor health are barriers to literacy

Poor health and other socio-economic factors can hurt our ability to learn.

- ◆ Better health leads to higher literacy in older children. They are less likely to fail or drop out of school or to be poor or unhealthy.
- ◆ People with higher levels of education can live in a better place, prepare their children to learn in school and look after their health better. They are less likely to smoke. They exercise more and eat healthier foods.
- ◆ Literacy helps build safer neighbourhoods by breaking the cycle of poverty and encouraging community involvement.

Fact

Nova Scotians have higher rates of chronic disease than other Canadians. They also face more socioeconomic conditions that increase chronic disease risk, such as limited education and income.

Literacy is for life.



What is literacy?

Literacy is **the** essential skill. It is the ability to use printed information to function in society, at work and in the family. It is the combination of thinking and social skills we need to analyze and use information to control our own lives, achieve our goals and develop our knowledge and potential.

Literacy Nova Scotia (LNS) supports the literacy community in Nova Scotia. Our mission is to make sure every Nova Scotian has access to quality literacy education.

How to reach us...



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Resources

National Literacy and Health Program,
www.nlhp.cpha.ca

How does literacy affect the health of Canadians?

Health Canada, 1998, www.nald.ca

Toward a Healthy Future: A Second Report on the Health of Canadians, 1999.

Beyond Words: The health-literacy connection,

Doris E. Gillis, www.canadian-health-network.ca.

The Health Literacy in Rural Nova Scotia Research Project, www.healthliteracystfx/project.htm.

Literacy barriers to health care

- ◆ It is hard for people with low literacy skills to understand health information.
- ◆ The way health care facilities and health workers use words or give information may intimidate patients with low literacy.
- ◆ People with lower literacy may feel nervous about the size or location of health care facilities.

Fact

People with lower literacy skills are more likely to be under social and economic stress. Stress is a major factor in many health problems.

Benefits for health and literacy

- ◆ Increased literacy skills = improved health
- ◆ Improved health = improved ability to learn
- ◆ Learning about health issues can be a good way to practice reading, writing, speaking, and math skills.
- ◆ By learning about health issues, adult learners develop skills and knowledge to improve their lives.

Literacy and health challenges

- ◆ Increase understanding of the links between literacy and health.
- ◆ Support children and adults to develop literacy skills to encourage healthy lifestyles.
 - ◆ Develop partnerships between health and literacy groups.
 - ◆ Use clear language and promote public participation to improve health literacy.
 - ◆ Attack poverty, which negatively impacts both literacy and health.

Fact

Only half of Nova Scotians understand printed information well enough to make informed decisions about their own or their family's health.

Literacy is for life.