

# Health Literacy

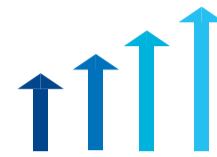
Of working age adults in England:



Average reading age is  
**11-14 years old** <sup>1</sup>

**42%**

are unable to understand or make use of everyday health information (health literacy) <sup>2</sup>



This rises to **61%** when numeracy skills are also required for comprehension (health numeracy) <sup>2</sup>



**43%** of adults struggle to understand instructions to calculate a childhood paracetamol dose. <sup>2</sup>

## Prevalence of low health literacy and numeracy by local authority <sup>4</sup>

	Low Health Literacy (%)	Low Health Literacy & Numeracy (%)
England	38.88	58.30
Herefordshire	37	56.78
Worcestershire	35.92	55.7

The strongest correlation to ill health – stronger than education level, deprivation, age or ethnicity – is health literacy <sup>6</sup>

Low health literacy is more likely in populations that experience health inequalities, including:

- Disabled people <sup>8</sup> Only 30% of GP surgeries have information that is accessible to people with learning disabilities <sup>9</sup>
- Older adults (65+) over four times more likely to have limited functional health literacy than the general population. 48% of people over 50 years with inadequate health literacy participated in cancer screening, compared with 58% of those with adequate health literacy <sup>15</sup>
- Disadvantaged socioeconomic groups such as people with low basic education <sup>17</sup> and lower income adults <sup>24</sup>.



## Long-term health conditions (LTCs)

- Low health literacy is more common among people with LTCs including diabetes <sup>10</sup>, heart disease <sup>11</sup>, stroke <sup>7</sup>, kidney disease <sup>12</sup>, and musculoskeletal disease <sup>13 14</sup>
- People with low health literacy less likely to successfully manage LTCs <sup>3</sup>

## Why is Health Literacy Important?

People with inadequate health literacy skills are more likely to experience poor health outcomes:

More likely to have worse health-limiting conditions and to report deteriorating self-rated health <sup>25</sup>

More likely to engage in unhealthy behaviours; smoking, drinking alcohol, sedentary lifestyle, unhealthy diet <sup>7, 19 - 22</sup>

Less likely to access prevention services (e.g. immunisation and cancer screening programmes) <sup>23</sup>

1.5 - 3 x more likely to experience increased hospitalisation or death <sup>18</sup>

### Lower Activation

In people with a chronic disease, those with low health literacy know significant less about their disease than those with adequate literacy <sup>5</sup>

For example, In a diabetes study 94% with adequate health functional health literacy knew the systems of hypoglycaemia compared with 50% of those with inadequate literacy. <sup>3</sup>



### Financial Cost

Economic cost of poor health literacy in England crudely estimated **between £2.95 billion and £4.92 billion per year** <sup>16</sup>



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