Health Literacy Online

Make an Impact with Your Online Content: Design for Usability and Accessibility

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Presentation Overview

- About the Guide
- What we know about web users with limited literacy skills
- Strategies for creating easy-to-use and accessible health websites
About the guide
Why use this guide?

- As many as half of U.S. adults have limited literacy skills

- Even more Americans — up to 9 in 10 — have limited health literacy skills
Why use this guide?

- The stakes can be high for users of health websites – trying to sign up for health insurance, learn about a new medical diagnosis, or look up how to install a child safety seat.
- Designing with limited-literacy users in mind results in health websites that are easier to use for everyone.
How the guide was developed

- Synthesizes lessons learned from ODPHP’s original research with more than 700 web users with limited literacy skills

- Incorporates best practices from the literature on cognitive processing and the online behavior of adults with limited literacy skills

- Builds and expands on principles of web usability described in the Research-Based Web Design and Usability Guidelines developed
What we know about web users with limited literacy skills
Prone to skipping and focus on the center of the screen

Easily overwhelmed and limited working memory

Struggle with search
More likely to be **smartphone dependent**
Sample strategies for creating easy-to-use health websites
Write **Actionable** Content
Put the most important information first.
Instead of telling people what not to do, give users positive reasons to change their behavior.

- **Before:**
  Never ride a bike without a helmet.

- **After:**
  Wear a helmet every time you ride a bike.
Provide specific action steps

**Watch Your Weight**

**Take Action: Set Goals**

Start by making a promise to eat well, move more, and get support from family and friends.

- **Set realistic goals.**
  - If you need to lose weight, do it slowly over time. Start out by setting small goals. Like:
  - I want to lose 1 to 2 pounds a week.
  - I will add 10 minutes of physical activity to my daily routine.
  - I will avoid second helpings of meals this week.

- **Keep a food and activity diary.**
  - When you know your habits, it’s easier to make changes. Write down:
  - When you eat
  - What you eat
  - How much you eat
  - Your physical activity

Print this food and activity diary or make your own.
2

Display Content Clearly
Limit paragraph size, use **bullets** and short lists

**Version 1**

**Eat Healthy**

The Basics: Overview

To be healthy, your body needs to get enough vitamins, minerals, and other nutrients. Eating healthy means getting plenty of vegetable and fruits, whole grains, fat-free or low-fat milk products, seafood, lean meats and poultry, eggs, beans and peas, and seeds and nuts.

Eating healthy also means limiting: a) cholesterol, sodium (salt), and added sugars, b) trans fats, which may be in foods like cakes, cookies, stick margarines, and fried foods, c) saturated fats, which come from animal products like cheese, fatty meats, whole milk, and butter, and d) foods made with refined grains, like white bread, noodles, white rice, and flour tortillas.

Get a personalized Daily Food Plan to help you choose healthy foods.

**Version 2**

**Eat Healthy**

The Basics: Overview

To be healthy, your body needs to get enough vitamins, minerals, and other nutrients. Eating healthy means getting plenty of:

- Vegetables, fruits, whole grains, and fat-free or low-fat milk products
- Seafood, lean meats and poultry, eggs, beans, peas, seeds, and nuts

Eating healthy also means limiting:

- Cholesterol, sodium (salt), and added sugars
- Trans fats, which may be in foods like cakes, cookies, stick margarines, and fried foods
- Saturated fats, which come from animal products like cheese, fatty meats, whole milk, and butter
- Foods made with refined grains, like white bread, noodles, white rice, and flour tortillas

Get a personalized Daily Food Plan to help you choose healthy foods.
Make websites **responsive** and design them to meet user needs

**Desktop**

**Mobile**

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Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion
Make interactions **easy** by placing frequently used buttons where they are easy to reach.
Organize Content and Simplify Navigation
Create **linear** information paths

What Are the Risk Factors for Colorectal Cancer?

Your risk of getting colorectal cancer increases as you get older. More than 90% of cases occur in people who are 50 years old or older. Other risk factors include having—

- **Inflammatory bowel disease**, Crohn’s disease, or ulcerative colitis.
- A personal or **family history** of colorectal cancer or colorectal polyps.
- A genetic syndrome such as **familial adenomatous polyposis (FAP)** or **hereditary non-polyposis colorectal cancer (Lynch syndrome)**.

**Lifestyle factors** that may contribute to an increased risk of colorectal cancer include—

- Lack of regular **physical activity**.
- Low **fruit and vegetable** intake.
- A low-fiber and high-fat **diet**.
- **Overweight and obesity**.
- **Alcohol** consumption.
- **Tobacco use**.

More Information

[What Is Colorectal Cancer?](#)  [What Can I Do to Reduce My Risk?](#)
Give buttons **meaningful** labels. Skip generic labels, like ‘Next’ or ‘Back’
Include a simple search function
4 Engage Users
Share information through multimedia

Provide information in multiple formats to engage users and foster learning. For example:

- **Visuals** to show spatial information (like maps)
- **Text** to communicate information you want users to remember in the long term
- **Sound** to convey information you want users to remember in the short term
Make content interactive
Provide **tailored** information
5 Test your site with users with limited literacy skills
Top 5 tips

① Partner with community organizations to recruit special populations
Top 5 tips

② Develop screeners, consent forms, and moderator’s guides in plain language
3 Test whether your content is understandable and actionable
Top 5 tips

4. Conduct testing sessions in a setting that is familiar and accessible to participants
Test on mobile using the participant’s device; ensure Wi-Fi is available
“It seems to be a really good website to go to if you are developing online programs. This will save a lot of time reviewing what you are developing. It’s very basic in the beginning (of development), but very important.”
– User Research Participant
“It’s very clear what the sections are for using health literacy. And it’s definitely in plain language, which is helpful. I really like the organization.”

– User Research Participant
“It looks good. The subsection is clearly differentiated. Very straightforward. Very accessible.”

– User Research Participant
“This Health Literacy guide is top notch. [I’m] obsessed with the navigation, the content structure, the writing style – I’m using this now as my example when I talk about the future of User Guides.“

- Emily, UX Analyst, U.S. General Services Administration
“I like [this website] because it’s easy for every day people like me to read. No big words or medical terms.”

– User Research Participant
Questions?