

AOTA's Societal Statement on Health Literacy

Health literacy, or the ability of individuals to gather, interpret, and use information to make suitable health-related decisions (Institute of Medicine, 2004), promotes participation, empowerment, and control over daily life (Nutbeam, 2008). Persons with inadequate health literacy are more likely to experience adverse health outcomes (DeWalt, Berkman, Sheridan, Lohr, & Pignone, 2004). Although those who possess adequate health literacy achieve better health outcomes, an estimated 90 million people in the United States have limited reading literacy, which also affects their ability to access services and achieve optimal health (Kirsch, Jungeblut, Jenkins, & Kolstat, 2002). Inadequate health literacy disproportionately affects people living at or below the poverty level, limiting their ability to sufficiently participate in health-related activities (Greenfield, Sugarman, Nargiso, & Weiss, 2005). Occupational therapy can promote health through the development and use of health education approaches and materials that are understandable, accessible, and usable by the full spectrum of consumers. Occupational therapy practitioners can assist in ensuring that all health-related information and education provided to recipients of occupational therapy or other health related services match that person's literacy abilities; cultural sensitivities; and verbal, cognitive, and social skills. In line with the health communication objectives (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2010), the American Occupational Therapy Association strives to ensure that occupational therapy practitioners possess appropriate communication and education skills that can help enable all people to gain access to, understand, and use occupational therapy and other health-related services, information, and education to promote self-management for optimum health and participation.

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