

Strategies to Improve Patient Education Materials

■ People at all literacy levels prefer simple, attractive materials.

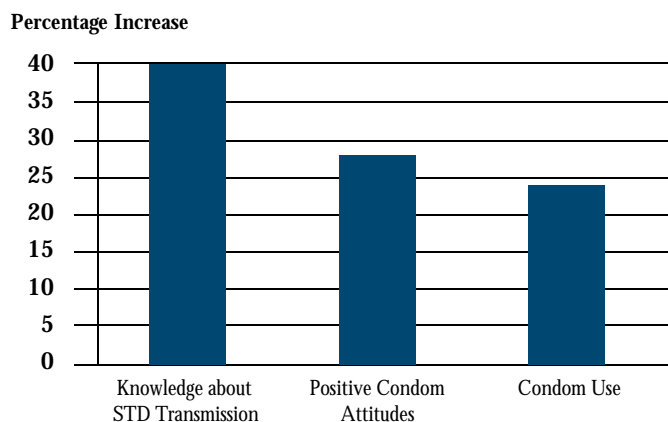
Pictures, diagrams, and videotapes help communicate information to patients, especially those with low literacy skills. Most people, even those who read well, rely on visual clues to reinforce learning.

Oral and visual tools help patients absorb new information, which increases learning.

- Supplementing text with pictures helps when providing self-care or medication instructions to low-literate patients.
- Tailoring medication schedules to fit a patient's daily routine, color coding medicines, and using daily events as reminders can help increase compliance.
- Videotaped patient education materials increase knowledge and promote correct self-care.
- A study of patients at a public STD clinic showed that AIDS prevention videos increased knowledge of STD transmission, encouraged more positive attitudes about condoms, and increased condom use. (see chart below)

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Change in Condom Attitudes and Use Among Patients Who Viewed an STD Prevention Video*



*691 control group and 496 video group members

Source: O'Donnell et al., 1995

Most written health care materials are too difficult to read for nearly *half* the population.

The most helpful written material for all users, but especially for poor readers:

- Are written at the lowest possible level of reading difficulty – generally, no higher than a 5th grade level. By contrast, most patient leaflets included with medicines are written at a 10th to 12th grade level.
 - Use clear captions, ample “white space,” and pictures or diagrams to attract the reader’s attention and reinforce the message.
 - Use common words. For example, they replace “chemotherapeutic agent” with “a drug that fights cancer.”
- Are prepared in cooperation with low-literate patients. Their input results in more culturally sensitive and personally relevant information.
 - Are limited to one or two educational objectives. What the reader will *learn* and *do* after reading the information.
 - Emphasize the desired behavior rather than the medical facts. Patients find it difficult to relate abstract statistics to their own experience.

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