



### Assessing the Literacy Skills of Your Adult Patients

You can quickly determine your patient's literacy with this oral reading and recognition test, known as the Rapid Estimate of Adult Literacy in Medicine (REALM). It measures a patient's ability to pronounce 66 common medical words and lay terms for body parts and illnesses. To use the REALM, follow these five steps:

1. Give the patient a copy of the following lists of words. (Keep a copy for yourself.)

List 1		List 2		List 3	
Fat	Cancer	Fatigue	Miscarriage	Allergic	Gonorrhea
Flu	Caffeine	Pelvic	Pregnancy	Menstrual	Inflammatory
Pill	Attack	Jaundice	Arthritis	Testicle	Diabetes
Dose	Kidney	Infection	Nutrition	Colitis	Hepatitis
Eye	Hormones	Exercise	Menopause	Emergency	Antibiotics
Stress	Herpes	Behavior	Appendix	Medication	Diagnosis
Smear	Seizure	Prescription	Abnormal	Occupation	Potassium
Nerves	Bowel	Notify	Syphilis	Sexually	Anemia
Germs	Asthma	Gallbladder	Hemorrhoids	Alcoholism	Obesity
Meals	Rectal	Calories	Nausea	Irritation	Osteoporosis
Disease	Incest	Depression	Directed	Constipation	Impetigo

2. Ask the patient to read aloud as many words as she can, beginning with the first word on List 1. When she comes to a word she cannot read, tell her to do the best she can or say, "blank," and then go on to the next word on the list.

If the patient takes longer than five seconds to read a word, prompt her to move on by saying, "blank," and pointing to the next word on the list. If the patient begins to miss every word, ask her to pronounce only those words she knows.

3. On your copy of the lists, keep score of the patient's answers. Next to each correctly pronounced word, write a plus sign (+). After each word that was not attempted or was mispronounced, write a minus sign (-).

Murphy, P. & Davis, T. (October 1997). When low literacy blocks compliance. *RN*, p. 61.



## Patient Education Workshop

### Assessing the Literacy Skills of Your Adult Patients continued

4. This total is the patient's raw score.
5. Compare the raw score to that of the table below to determine your patient's reading level.

Raw Score	Reading Level
0-18	<i>Third grade and below:</i> Patient won't be able to read most low literacy materials. She will need repeated oral instructions or written materials composed of primarily of illustrations.
19-44	<i>Fourth to sixth grade:</i> Patient will need low literacy materials and may not be able to read prescription labels.
45-60	<i>Seventh to eighth grade:</i> Patient will have trouble reading most patient education materials. Use low literacy materials.
61-66	<i>High school:</i> Patient will be able to read most patient education materials.

Source: Davis, T., Crouch, M. & Long, S. (1993). *Rapid Estimate of Adult Literacy in Medicine (REALM)*. Shreveport, LA: Louisiana State University Medical Center.

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