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March 12, 2026

International Symposium on the Fukushima Health Management Survey

# Health Information as Medicine

## A Guide to Health Literacy



SCHOOL OF PUBLIC HEALTH  
Takemi Program  
in International Health

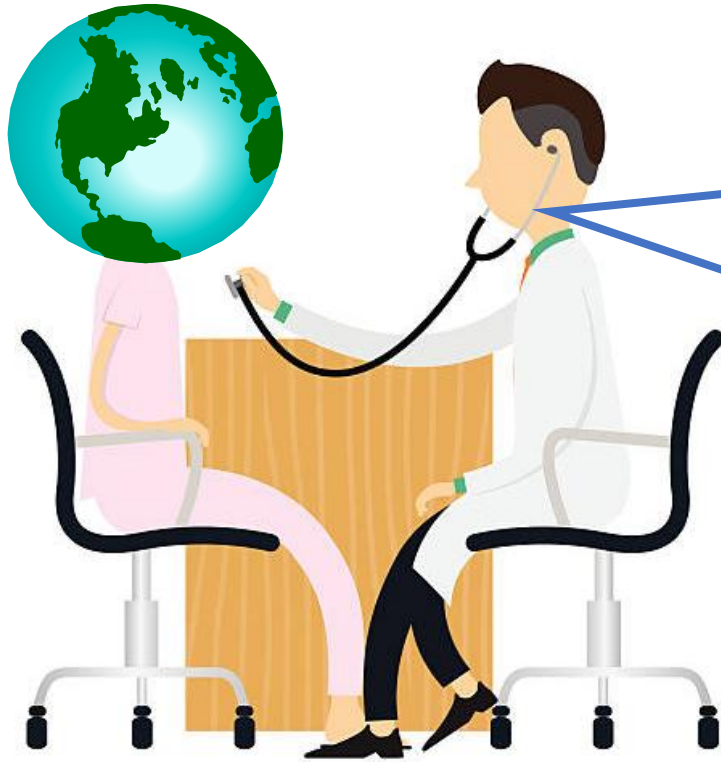


**GOTO Aya**

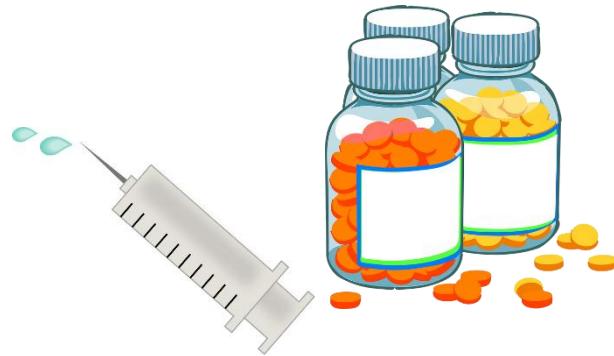
Department of Global Health and Population & Takemi Program in International Health  
Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health  
Center for Integrated Science and Humanities & Office of Pregnancy and Birth Survey,  
Radiation Medical Science Center for the Fukushima Health Management Survey  
Fukushima Medical University

The materials related to this talk are available here:  
<https://hsph.harvard.edu/fellowship-special-program/takemi/international-health-literacy/>

Community



Public health nurses  
and doctors



Health policies  
Health promotion activities

# Today's topics



What is health literacy?

Let's know your health literacy level

How to increase your health literacy level

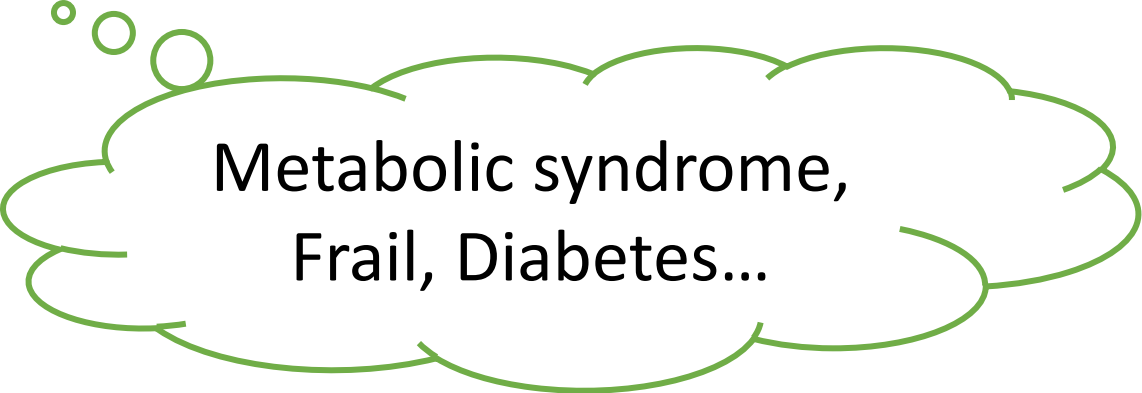
How to communicate with health professionals

Tips for healthier living

# Definition of health literacy

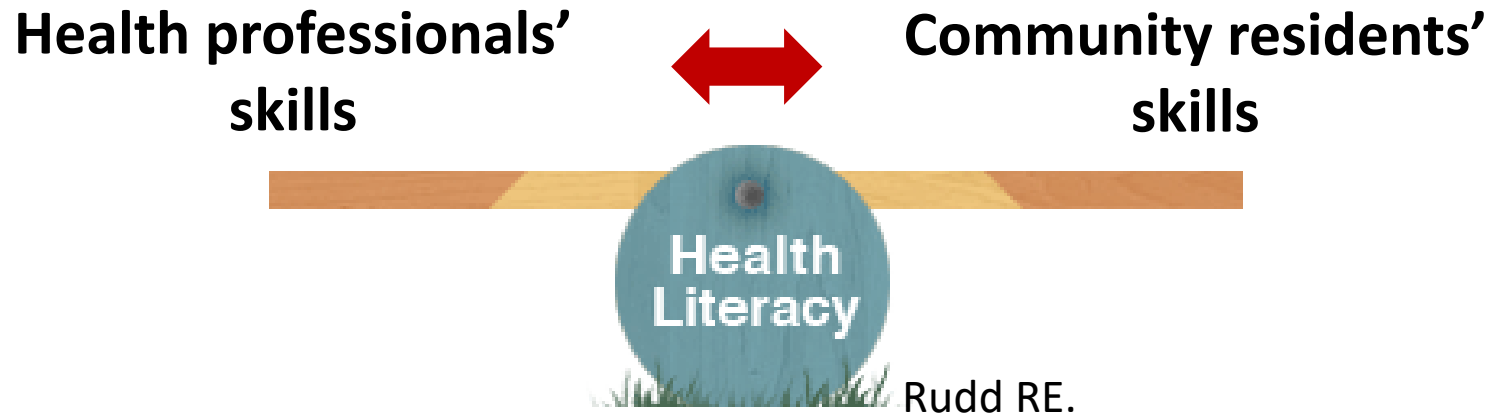
World Health Organization, 1998

“The cognitive and social skills which determine the motivation and ability of individuals to gain access to understand and use information in ways which promote and maintain good health”



Metabolic syndrome,  
Frail, Diabetes...

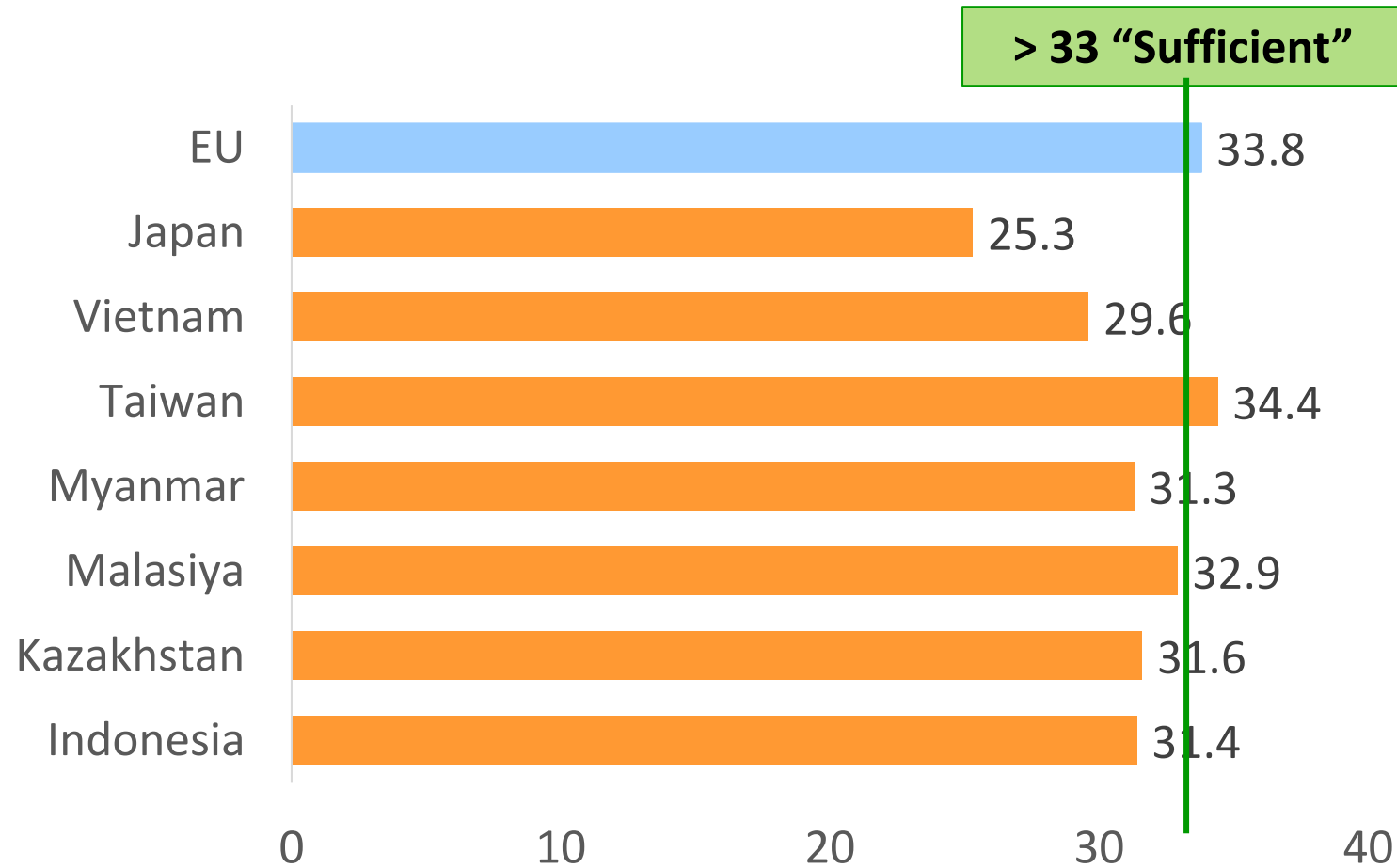
# Expansion of the definition



It is not a one-way transmission of information from healthcare professionals.

**Bilateral communication** is required.

# Health literacy level in Japan

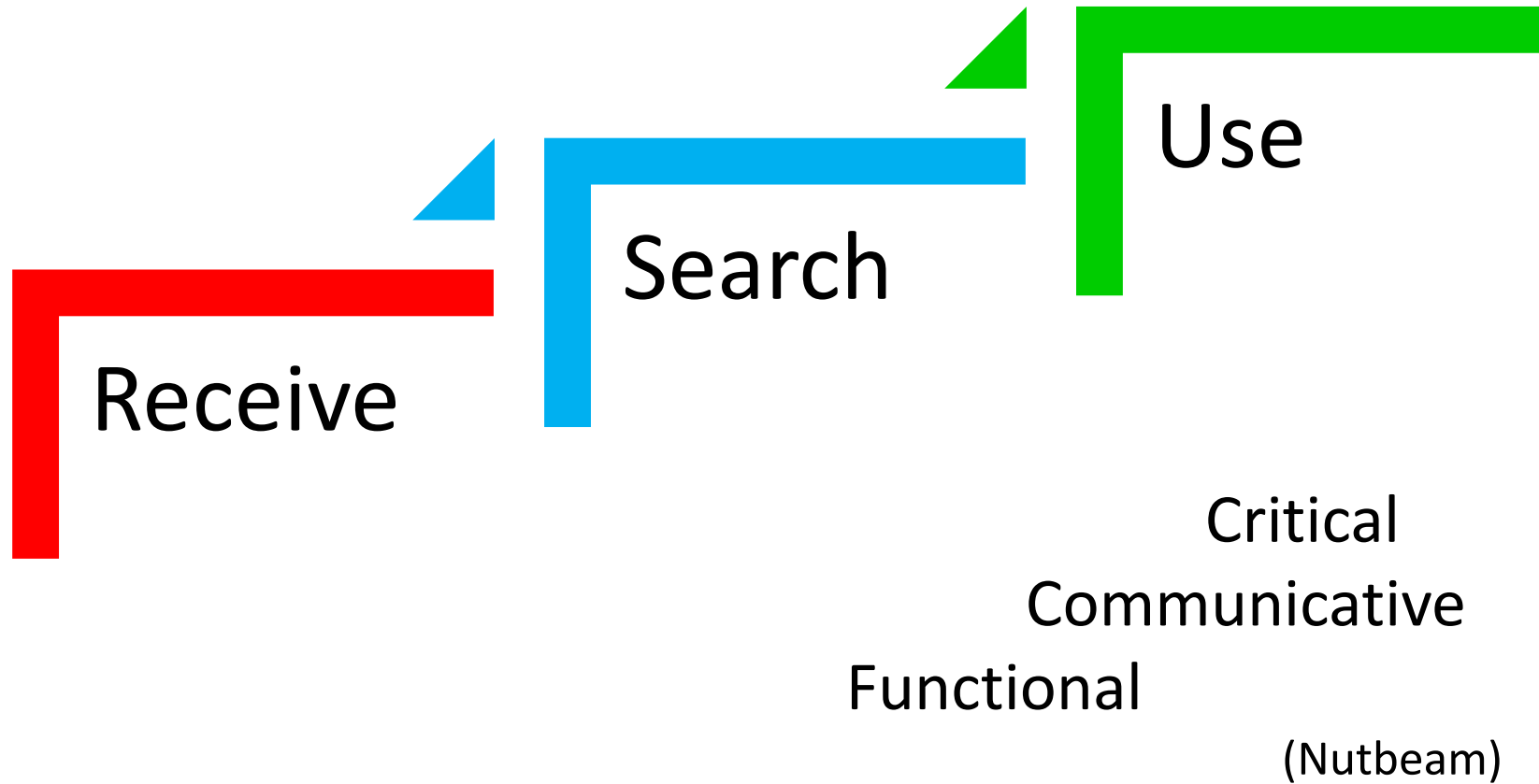


European Health Literacy Survey (HLS-EU-Q47)

Score range: 0-50

Duong TV, et al. Journal of Epidemiology. 2017; 27: 80e86.

# Three levels of health literacy



# Check your health literacy level

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
<b>1. Collect health-related information from various sources</b>	1	2	3	4	5
<b>2. Extract the information you want</b>	1	2	3	4	5
<b>3. Understand and communicate the obtained information</b>	1	2	3	4	5
<b>4. Consider the credibility of the information</b>	1	2	3	4	5
<b>5. Make decisions based on the information</b>	1	2	3	4	5

**Mean score (Sum of five items  $\div$  5)**

**3.5 or slightly above for the Japanese public**

Ishikawa H, et al. Health Promot Int. 2008; 23(3): 269-74.

Tomita S, et al. BMJ Open 2022; 12: e052731.

## Health literacy measurement (CCHL)

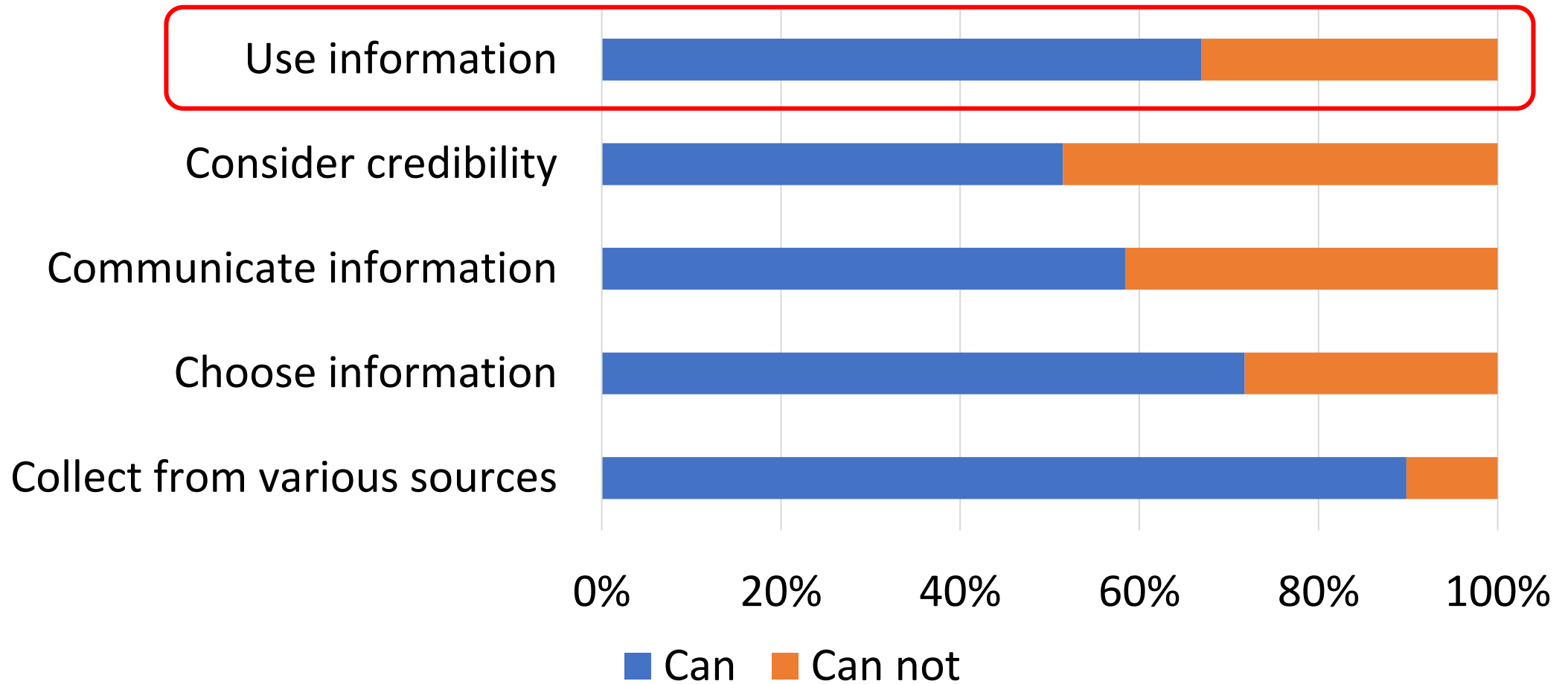
1. Collect health-related information from various sources
2. Extract the information you want
3. Understand and communicate the obtained information
4. Consider the credibility of the information
5. Make decisions based on the information



## Fukushima City Health Promotion Plan 2024 Objectives

1. The number of residents who use the city's health and medical information increases
2. The number of residents who can search for the health information and make decisions based on the information increases

# Fukushima City LINE Survey 2024



No. of Respondents 1756

(Response rate: 3.2% among who agree to receive the LINE survey messages)

Survey period: September to October 2024

# Health literacy and health status

Low health literacy is associated with insufficient prevention, worsening of health condition, and a high mortality.



Berkman ND, et al. *Ann Intern Med.* 2011; 155: 97-107.

Duong and Chang. *Asia Pac J Public Health.* 2024; 36: 8-19.

Studies in Japan: High health literacy is associated with adequate prevention and control of diseases like lifestyle related diseases and frailty.



*BMJ Open* 2022; 12: e052731. *Geriatr Gerontol Int* 2017; 17: 804-9.

*Patient Educ Couns.* 2011; 84: 393-7. *Patient Educ Couns.* 2015; 98: 660-8.



High health literacy is further related with...

- Higher satisfaction toward medical services

Aoki T and Inoue M. PLoS One. 2017; 12: e0184565.

- Higher trust toward health care professionals

Oguro N, et al. J Rheumatol. 2023; 50: 649-655.

**Communicate with your health care providers!**

## Ask Me 3

Ask Me 3 encourages patients to ask three specific questions to better understand their health conditions and what they need to do.

1. What is my main problem?
2. What do I need to do?
3. Why is it important for me to do this?

Terri Ann Parnell. Health literacy in nursing. Springer.

Tesamut, et al. J Prim Care Community Health.  
2026; 17: 21501319251412653.

# Teach-back

The teach-back method encourages a health care provider to ask a patient to explain the information in their own words.

*“When you get home, what will you tell your family about this condition?”*

*“I want to make sure I explained things clearly. So tell me, how do you take this medicine?”*

<https://www.ahrq.gov/health-literacy/improve/precautions/tool5.html>

Yen PH, Leasure AR. Fed Pract. 2019; 36(6): 284–289

# How to increase your health literacy level

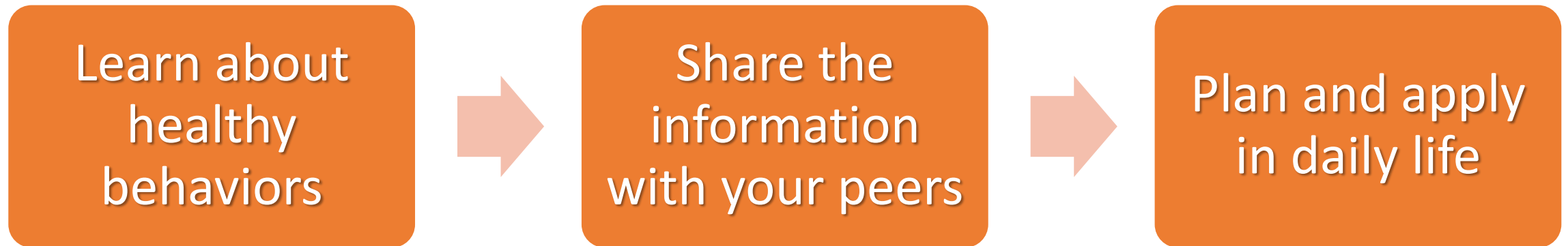
Learn to respond to the teach-back question

Liu YB, et al. Jpn J Nurs Sci. 2018; 15: 195-202.

Participate in a participatory session like the one below.

Uemura K, et al. J Am Geriatr Soc. 2018; 66: 1721-1729.

Gerontology 2021; 67: 25-35.



Such a participatory learning session can also improve your memory, physical function, and nutrition.

# Useful health information: Nutrition Detective

US CDC recommended citizen family program

Key messages:

1. The FIRST ingredient is always the biggest!
2. Avoid foods with a LONG ingredient list
3. Avoid high fructose corn syrup etc.

Katz DL, et al. Prev Chronic Dis 2014;11:130161.



## **Ingredients**



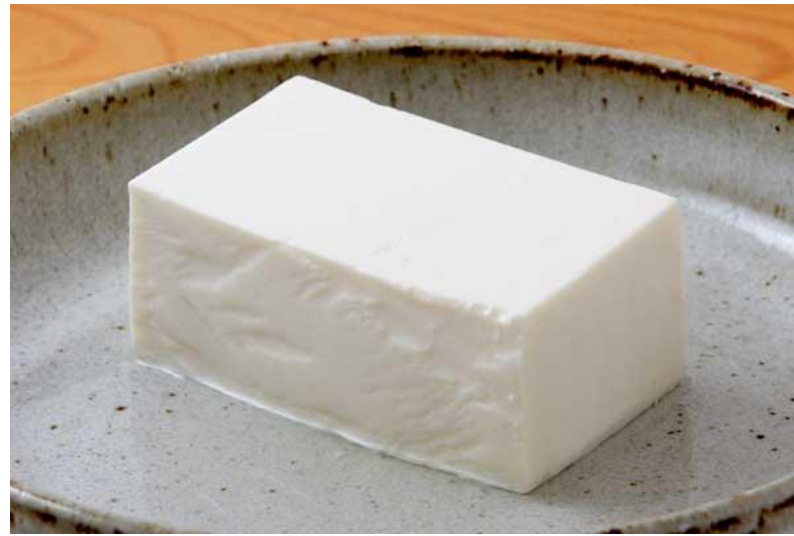
## **Product A**

Apples, sugars (high fructose corn syrup, sugar), acidity regulator, flavoring, antioxidant (vitamin C)

## **Product B**

Apples (Fukushima)

## **Ingredients**



### **Product A**

Whole soybeans (non-GMO), magnesium chloride (bittern)

### **Product B**

Whole soybeans (Canada or USA), salt, coagulant (magnesium chloride (bittern)), anti-foaming agents (glycerol fatty acid esters, lecithin, and magnesium carbonate)

# Useful health information: Steps

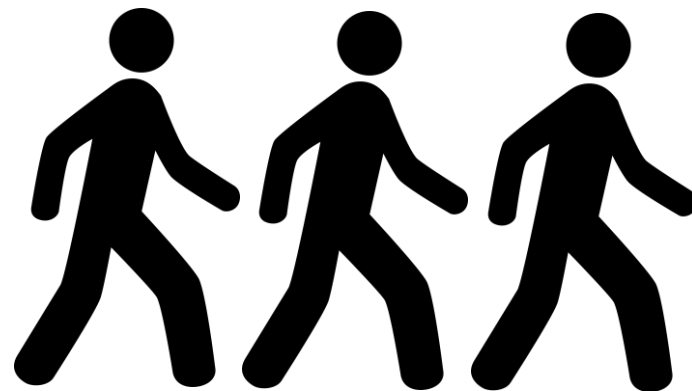
Less than 60 years old: up to 8,000 steps

60 years old or older: up to 6,000 steps

The more you walk, the lower your risk of mortality.

Paluch AE, et al. Lancet Public Health. 2022; 7(3): e219-e228.

Goto F. Build your brain and body to enjoy aging. Chuo Koron Shinsho.

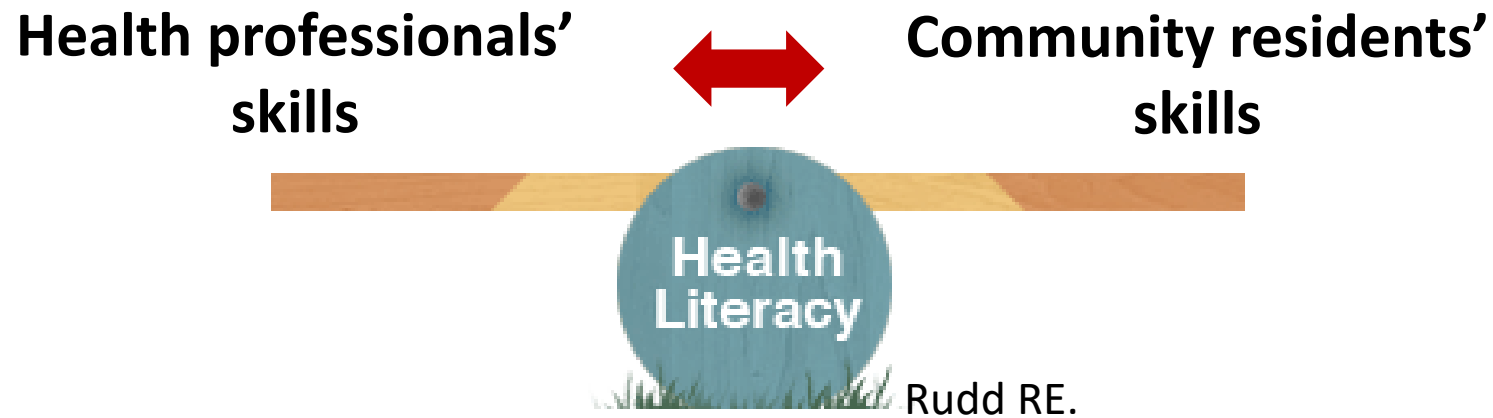


# How to choose health information



- Who wrote this information and for what purpose?  
(Selling a product?)
- What is the source of the information?  
(Just a personal opinion?)
- When was this information published?  
(Is it outdated?)
- Did you compare it with other sources?

**→ Pick and use!**



**Improve your ability to use health information to promote wellness.**

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