

Health literacy can promote older people's health

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How easy is it for older individuals to understand what their doctor tells them or to evaluate whether health information in the media is reliable? A new study on older Finnish people's health literacy found that one

third of 75-year-old Finns find it difficult to understand and use health-related information.

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The new study, conducted at the Faculty of Sport and Health Sciences at the University of Jyväskylä, was aimed at 75-year-old people, with the primary purpose of testing the validity of a Finnish translation of the short form the European Health Literacy Survey Questionnaire. As a result, the questionnaire was found to be feasible to use for research purposes in this age group. In addition, the results indicated that high [health literacy](#) can be a resource in old age.

"Our results," says postdoctoral researcher Johanna Eronen, "showed that those people whose health literacy was higher had better physical functioning, fewer illnesses and they were more likely to rate their health as very good than those whose health literacy was low. Consequently, low health literacy can be a risk factor for adverse health outcomes."

Health literacy means the ability to find, understand, use and assess health-related information in order to manage one's health and find adequate health services. For example, it describes how easy or difficult it is for an older person to use health information from different sources or to understand instructions given by health professionals.

"In our study," Eronen says, "evaluating the reliability of [health information](#) in the media and using this information was often perceived as difficult."

Research on health literacy can promote health service development

The data for this study were collected in 2017 and 2018, and new analyses are planned for this year.

"This was our first study using this data and it included only participants aged 75," says Eronen. "Therefore these results are only preliminary."

For the next study, Eronen plans to use the all of the data, which include almost one thousand people aged 75, 80 and 85. In addition to health literacy, the data include a wide array of information on the participants' health, functioning and environment.

"We are interested to see if health literacy can promote a physically [active lifestyle](#) and active aging," Eronen says about the future plans.

Currently, there is very little [information](#) on the [health literacy](#) of older Finns. Further research on this topic is needed and the results can be used when planning and developing health services for this population and improving health communication.

More information: Johanna Eronen et al, Assessment of health literacy among older Finns, *Aging Clinical and Experimental Research* (2018). [DOI: 10.1007/s40520-018-1104-9](https://doi.org/10.1007/s40520-018-1104-9)

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