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## Context

Health literacy (HL) is the capacity to obtain, process, and understand basic health information and services needed to make appropriate health decisions. One in five Australians have very low HL. Obesity is common (27%) among patients presenting in Australian general practice. Socioeconomically disadvantaged adults are both more likely to be obese and have lower levels of HL.

## Aims

- Assess the HL of obese patients attending general practice using the 9 scales of the Health Literacy Questionnaire (HLQ) (Fig. 1)
- Evaluate the relationship of HL with diet (portions of fruit/veg. /day) and physical activity (PA)/week.

**Diet:** How many portions of fruit and vegetables are eaten daily?



**Physical activity:** How many times 20 min. of high PA and 30 min. of moderate PA are done weekly?



## Methods

**Practices:** 17 of the 20 enrolled (in disadvantaged areas in Sydney and Adelaide) contributed data  
**Patients:** 40-70 years; no chronic disease; not prescribed weight loss medicines, antidepressants; no past/planned bariatric surgery  
**Time period:** April – December 2015  
**Languages:** English, Arabic, Italian  
**Data collection:** Phone interviews using a validated questionnaire.

## Results\*

### Patient characteristics

Number of patients recruited	204
Number of patients interviewed	119
Female, N (%)	78 (65)
Age in years, mean (SD)	56 (8.2)
Born overseas, N (%)	55 (46)
Primarily speaking English at home, N (%)	82 (69)
Arrival year in Australia, range (median)	1954-2013 ('76)
Employed, N (%)	58 (49)
Education – school only, N (%)	51 (43)
BMI, mean (SD)	37 (5.2)

### HLQ Scores

Scale	Mean (SD)
Range 1 (lowest) – 4 (highest)	
Feel understood and supported by HCP <sup>^</sup>	3.17 (.47)
Have social support for health	3.00 (.53)
Have sufficient information to manage health	2.89 (.52)
Appraise health information	2.74 (.51)
Actively manage health	2.67 (.49)
Range 1 (lowest) – 5 (highest)	
Able to actively engage with HCP	3.99 (.66)
Understand health information well	3.91 (.75)
Navigate the healthcare system	3.70 (.74)
Able to find good quality health information	3.69 (.83)

\*Not every question was answered by every respondent  
<sup>^</sup>Healthcare providers

### Correlations with Health Literacy

Physical activity was significantly correlated with the scales *Actively manage health* ( $p=.001$ ) and *Have social support for health* ( $p=.011$ ).

There were no statistically significant correlations between any HLQ scales and Diet.\*

\*The abstract gave statistically significant results, however, some patients have since been excluded from the analysis and this slightly altered the results.

### Innovative contribution to practice

Levels of HL were lowest for patients actively managing health and finding and appraising health information. This suggests that obese patients may need more support to develop HL in these areas for better health outcomes.

HL was higher in patients doing higher levels of physical activity. Those with lower HL may be less receptive to receiving advice on physical activity.

Primary healthcare professionals (GPs and practice nurses) are well placed to assess patient HL and tailor their approach to the patient's HL strengths and weaknesses.

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**Fig. 1** The nine scales of the Health Literacy Questionnaire (HLQ)

