

# Health literacy interventions for reducing the use of primary and emergency services for minor health problems: a systematic review

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## Plain English summary

Reducing the use of primary and emergency services

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## Plain English summary

### What was the question?

Some people struggle to find information about their health and understand it. This is known as having a low level of 'health literacy'.

People with a low level of health literacy are more likely to go to an accident and emergency department or seek an appointment with their doctor when they have minor health problems such as stomach upsets or coughs/colds.

This study looked for research on how to improve people's health literacy so they can (1) look after minor health problems and (2) know how to access the right services.

### What did we do?

We undertook a systematic review. This means bringing together previous research to learn about what works.

We held meetings with patients, carers, doctors and NHS managers to plan the review and talk about the findings.

### What did we find?

We found 67 research papers. These tested booklets, leaflets and websites about how to look after minor health problems. They also tested websites that ask questions about symptoms and then offer a solution (digital self-triage). People found these things helpful. Two out of every three research papers showed that fewer people went to accident and emergency or a doctor after using a booklet or website. We could not work out why only some studies showed changes in service use. This meant that we were not certain that these initiatives worked, but felt that they had potential. There was no sign that the initiatives were unsafe in terms of people not accessing services when they needed to.

### What does this mean?

Similar initiatives are being used in the NHS now. They have the potential to stop people going to accident and emergency and their doctor with minor health problems. But they need to be tested further to make sure they are working and to understand why they are working.

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