

Health Literacy in a Digital Landscape

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Improving Health Literacy Online

The transition to online health information and services poses a unique set of challenges for Web users with limited health literacy skills or limited experience on the Internet. The Web can be stressful and overwhelming—even inaccessible. Much of this stress is the result of complex health content and poorly designed Web sites and applications.

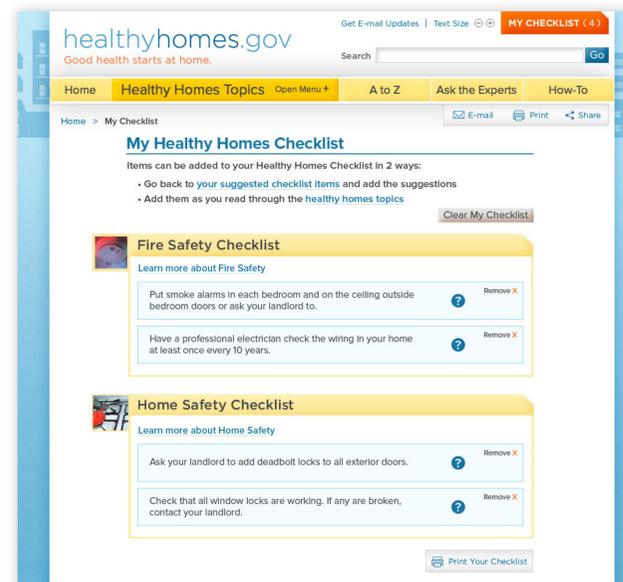
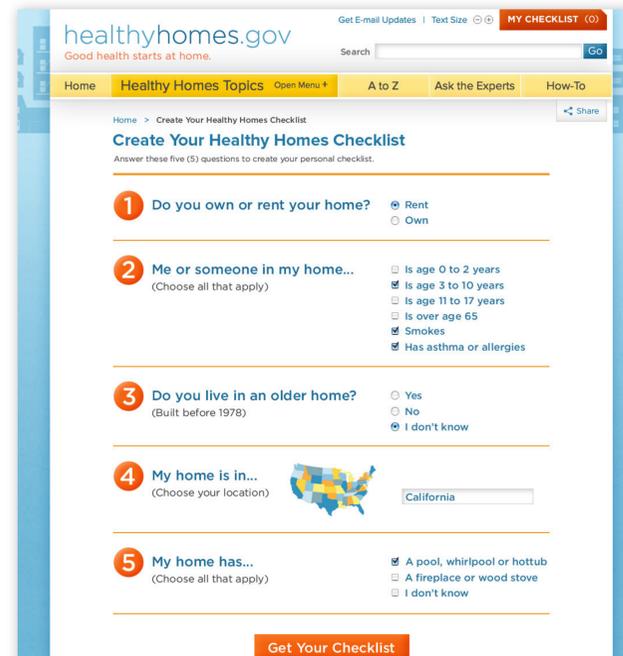
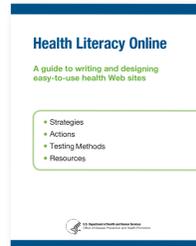
In 2010, HHS released *Health Literacy Online*, a research-based, how-to guide for designing health Web sites and content for the millions of Americans with limited literacy skills and limited experience using the Web.

What We Know About Users with Limited Literacy Skills

- Willing and able to use the Web
- Difficulty scanning
- Difficulty searching
- Focus on the center of the screen
- Easily overwhelmed
- Limited working memory
- Appreciate simple navigation

Strategies

1. **Learn** about your users
2. **Write** actionable content
3. **Display** content clearly
4. **Organize** and simplify
5. **Engage** users
6. **Evaluate** and revise



HealthyHomes.gov Case Study

Healthyhomes.gov (to launch in 2012) - a new Federal site for middle to low-income parents - was developed using research and strategies outlined in *Health Literacy Online*. The site will include several interactive health education tools and provides a case study in developing accessible, interactive health information for users who struggle with health literacy.



Methods

- Environmental scan
- Literature review
- 6 focus groups, n = 48
- Stakeholders interviews, n = 13
- Card sorting, n = 16
- Prototype testing, n = 16
- 2 rounds of usability testing, n = 16

"I need to know what my rights are. I had an issue with a leak and I complained to my landlord, but it took almost 6 months for him to fix it."

Findings and Implications

- + Most participants did not have the same mental models of healthy homes as public health professionals
 - ➔ **Implication:** Created a site organizational structure that would resonate with users
- + Participants often did not connect the dots between their home and their health
 - ➔ **Implication:** Created content and multi-media testimonials to make connections clear
- + Participants needed personalized strategies and local resources to take action
 - ➔ **Implication:** Created personalized tools such as a build your own checklist and local resources feature
- + Participants relied heavily on visual cues from pictures and icons to get oriented to the site
 - ➔ **Implication:** Chose pictures and developed icons that would aid understanding and make content easier to scan
- + Participants wanted to save money by 'doing it themselves'
 - ➔ **Implication:** Created a 'How To' section on the site and when relevant, developed and linked to 'How-To' content and videos

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