



Nutrition for Family Living

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Communicating with Limited-Literacy Learners
Reframing Obesity

Communicating with Limited-Literacy Learners

Susan Nitzke

The Administration on Aging's National Aging Services Network (Aging Network) has compiled resources on how best to communicate with individuals, especially older adults. Their *Communicating with Older Adults* website lists recommended resources on general communication, health literacy, plain language, and guidelines for website design. You can access this resource at www.aoa.gov/prof/communicating/communicating.asp.

The Food Stamp Nutrition Connection and WIC Works also have handy reference and training materials on this topic. Go to <http://foodstamp.nal.usda.gov/>, click on professional development tools, hot topics A-Z, and Health Literacy or go to http://www.nal.usda.gov/wicworks/Topics/Health_Literacy.html.

Implications for Extension Educators: Extension Nutrition Educators are often faced with the challenge of identifying materials to meet the needs of learners with literacy limitations. For example, a Core Competency of WNEP Coordinators is to "Design activities based on learning styles and audience needs." The WNEP Teaching Resources Database includes materials that have been developed with literacy skills in mind. The websites outlined above are an additional resource, offering reliable advice on factors to consider when planning programs that involve communicating with learners who have limited literacy..



Reframing Obesity

By Gayle Coleman

The authors of the viewpoint, *Moving Nutrition Upstream: The Case for Reframing Obesity*, make the argument that American society largely sees obesity as an issue to be addressed through personal responsibility. The authors encourage a reframing of the causes of obesity to include assuring that the environment people live in fosters healthy eating and physically active lifestyles. The authors indicate that although some individuals adopt healthier behaviors despite living in an obesogenic environment, it is extremely difficult to overcome this environment to create healthier lifestyles on a broader population level.

The authors use the traditional public health “upstream/downstream” metaphor to describe this reframing. If the majority of public health intervention is to rescue drowning people in the river downstream (e.g. people who are already obese), then there aren’t sufficient time, energy, and resources available to go upstream to see what is causing so many people to fall in the river (e.g. develop obesity) in the first place. This metaphor can be extended so that “upstream” approaches to the obesity issue include understanding the problem as a social, political and economic one that requires basic social change to alter the conditions that facilitate obesity. Personal responsibility is still important, but approaches like educating people about eating more fruits and vegetables will only be effective at a broad population level if the environment supports them through access to affordable produce. The authors suggest that the discussion of obesity today parallels where tobacco control was 30 years ago. The current “shared responsibility” approach to tobacco control includes government and industry taking responsibility to create smoke-free environments and limiting the marketing of tobacco, while individual smokers do everything they can to quit.

Reframing obesity shifts the emphasis from being solely on personal responsibility to a shared responsibility approach where the environment more easily allows individuals to make healthy choices.

Implications for Extension Educators. This viewpoint highlights the need for a comprehensive approach to reduce the incidence of unhealthy weight. It provides rationale for work with community groups to support health-friendly environments at the local level, and individuals and organizations who can advocate for health-friendly public policy as well as continued nutrition and health education efforts with individuals.

Dorfman L and Wallack L. *Moving Nutrition Upstream: The Case for Reframing Obesity.*
Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior 2007;39:S45-S50.