

HOW READABLE ARE YOUR NUTRITION EDUCATION MATERIALS?

A.M BEGLEY*, J.A SCOTT* and J.C RICHARDS**

Readability should be a major consideration in the use of nutrition education materials for the general public. Readability formulas measure the word difficulty and sentence length of a passage (Nitzke 1989). Obviously the more syllables in a word or the longer the sentences, the more difficult the materials.

An essential criteria for materials developed for the National Heart Foundation funded Kwinana "Healthy Hearts" Project was the material to be suitable for the low socio-economic target group. In an effort to assess the current status of cholesterol education materials in Australia a study was undertaken to determine the readability of materials easily available to health professionals and the public. Twenty six materials were identified from government, professional agencies and private organisations. Readability was assessed in terms of reading grade level using the SMOG grading (McLaughlin 1969) and the FOG formula (O'Laughlin Pastore and Kirsner 1987). Each formula was applied to each material by two researchers. Any results for a material that were more than two grades different were repeated by a third independent researcher. The two readability results were averaged for each education material.

The results revealed an average SMOG grading for all materials of grade 10.4 (SD 1.5) and the FOG grade of 10.6 (SD 2.2). A correlation of the results of the two readability formulas gave a correlation coefficient of 0.6. These results correspond with a similar study conducted on American cholesterol education materials by Glanz and Rudd (1990), where the SMOG gave a mean of 10.8 and the FOG a mean of 10.9. The correlation coefficient between the two formulas was 0.78. The analysis of these materials shows that the average reading grade was above Year 10. In an effort to reach the majority of the population there are recommendations to aim for material around Year 8 reading level or lower (Farrell-Miller and Gentry 1988). So when next considering using existing education materials or developing your own, consider your target group and conduct a quick readability analysis on your material.

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*School of Public Health, Curtin University of Technology, Perth, Western Australia 6001

**School of Psychology, Curtin University of Technology, Perth, Western Australia 6001