

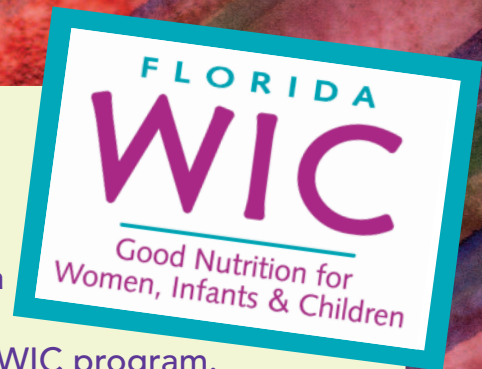
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Visit us on line at: www.readforhealth.com

Your "Read for Health" newsletter
SPECIAL EDITION

Rx for reading

Welcome to our SPECIAL EDITION featuring the Florida Department of Health's (FDOH) Women, Infant and Children (WIC) program. We choose to release this special edition as a result of our extensive partnership between the Read for Health Initiative and the FDOH WIC program.



The FDOH WIC Program has been an active partner with the Read for Health Initiative since its inception in March 2002. In addition, the FDOH WIC program has been supported nationally by the United States Department of Agriculture, the funding agency for the WIC Program, in its national initiative titled "WIC Healthy Children Ready to Read Partnership," which was formed to establish and expand efforts to facilitate and encourage reading readiness among WIC children.

The main goal of the Read for Health Initiative is to promote and improve literacy among Florida families, thereby enabling them to access health care appropriately, understand and follow basic health care instructions, and interact with their children in ways that lead to optimal growth and development.

WIC is the perfect partner for the Read for Health Initiative since WIC provides the "perfect audience." Its clients range in age from infants and children up to age 5, to pregnant, breastfeeding and postpartum women. This population can influence entire families through the education they receive from both the WIC Program and the Read for Health Initiative.



WIC Local Agency Literacy Highlights

We are proud to acknowledge that the Department's local WIC agencies throughout the State continue to encompass the Read for Health Initiative with zest and enthusiasm. Following are some examples of Read for Health in action in local WIC clinics:

1. The first major effort by the FDOH WIC Program to encompass the Read for Health Initiative was to provide copies of five different children's nutrition books to each WIC agency within the state through funding offered by the Miami-Dade WIC Program. Each local WIC agency was encouraged to use these books as a beginning step to encourage the development of a "reading library" for all WIC clinics. WIC has a captive audience for encouraging literacy at an early age; beginning with the prenatal mother, reaching children up to the age of five, and continuing to touch Florida families beyond these years.



**MIAMI-DADE
WIC**

2. Escambia County's efforts to encourage reading with WIC children include reading nutrition and/or health-related books to the child during a nutrition education counseling session at the client's recertification appointment. The agency reports that this gives them the opportunity to provide education directly to the child; the counselor reads directly to the child and encourages participation by asking them to identify foods and characters from the book. The parent is learning valuable nutrition information, as well as learning how to read interactively with their children. Reports are that, "our clients love this approach!"



**ESCAMBIA
COUNTY
WIC**

3. Miami-Dade reports that lesson plans have been developed that use children's nutrition or health-related books to teach a particular nutrition message that needs to be emphasized to the client. One lesson plan, "Eating the Alphabet Fruits and Vegetables A to Z," encourages clients to serve their family meals with 50 percent of each plate filled with fruits and/or vegetables. Other lesson plans target the obesity message and the agency uses "The Very Hungry Caterpillar" and "Stone Soup." "The Picky Eater" and "Gregory the Terrible Eater" books have lesson plans developed to use as tools for nutrition education to clients.

4. Palm Beach County staff continues to demonstrate commitment to the Read for Health initiative, and have used many types of educational venues to present the importance of reading to children throughout the community. Some of these activities include participating in a mass Head Start screening day where the "Give me 5 a Day" book was given to over 230 children and offering "Eating the Alphabet Fruits and Vegetables A to Z" to WIC children visiting clinic sites during the month.

**Miami-Dade
WIC**



5. Several local WIC agencies have waiting rooms in clinic areas that are supplied with both adult and children's books.

6. Other local WIC agency efforts include providing nutrition presentations at local libraries and elementary schools, and offering a mini-library card application that the caregivers can take to the local library and receive children's books.

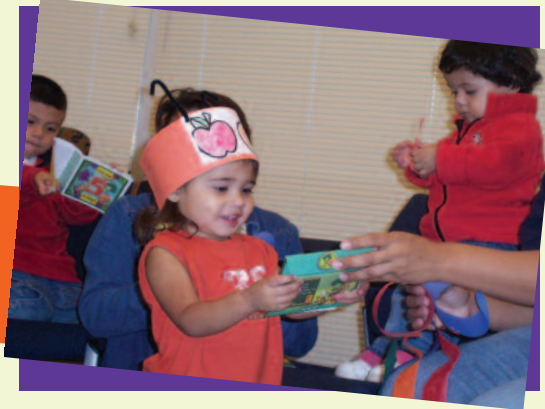
7. Some local libraries drop off books "on loan" at the WIC clinic sites.

8. Volunteers in some agencies are available to read to children while their caregivers wait for WIC services.

9. One agency has a plan titled "Read-while-you-wait" where caregivers are given a punch card that is hole-punched each time a caregiver reads either to herself or to a child in the waiting room of the clinic site. At the end of

ten reading times, an award packet is given to the family.

10. Others agencies have group appointments where reading nutrition-related children's books to members of these groups is a major component of the education provided during the office visit.



Department of Health Authors Children's Books

Nutrition staff of the Florida Department of Health WIC Program have written and produced three different children's nutrition-related books to promote good nutrition habits and physical activity; they are: *Give Me 5 A Day!*, *Carlos and Clarice Mooove to Lowfat Milk!*, and *The Whole Grain Choo Choo Train*. The books are available in both English and Spanish. These three children's books have been distributed to all of the local WIC agencies in the State, and they are hugely popular with WIC staff and clients alike. The books have been used in multiple settings to promote the messages of eating more fruits and vegetables, choosing fat free and low fat milk, and whole grains. These children's books are met with enthusiasm by the local clinic sites and WIC clients, and everyone continues to ask for more, more, more children's books! The Department of Health Distribution Center helps to promote and distribute these books, not only to local WIC clinics in Florida, but also to WIC agencies and other programs, like elementary schools, throughout Florida. The books can be seen at www:Florida.WIC.org.



Books written by the staff of the Florida Department.

Nutritious Story Time

Another interesting teaching method was born out of the reading initiative as part of a family literacy program for preschoolers called "Nutritious Story Time." Nutritious Story Time is the brainchild of Mary Stickney, a registered dietitian from the Orange County Health Department who also holds a Masters in Early Childhood Education. Nutritious Story Time teaches positive health and nutrition messages and makes nutrition education fun and interesting for young children and their parents. In "Nutritious Story Time," reading and literacy activities are modeled to parents to encourage parents to read to their children at home. One of the Department of Health children's book (or another children's book) is read to the children with the parents in the room. Children then play games, sing songs, and have craft projects that emphasize the theme of the book. The Nutritionist shares nutrition information with parents and also shares information on activities they can do at home with their children to help prepare them for school. Children are often given a book to take home and parents are encouraged to read to their children at home each day.

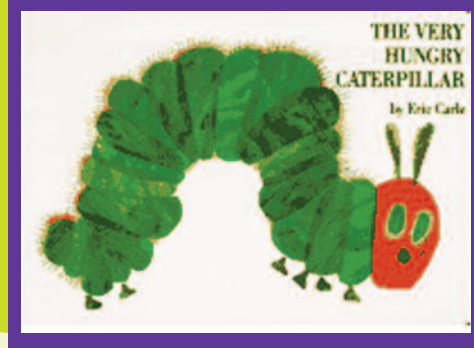
**Mary Stickney
Orange County
WIC**



"Nutritious Story Time" was met with such enthusiasm that Ms. Stickney now travels to other local WIC agencies throughout the State at their request and trains agencies' staff on the use of these materials in their own clinic sites. Ms. Stickney presented this program at the National WIC Association Annual Meeting in 2006 in Phoenix, Arizona, and other WIC state agencies throughout the nation have requested copies of her materials for use in their own State WIC Programs. The Nutritious Story Time lesson plans can be found at the WIC website: www.FloridaWIC.org.



Read for Health Grant:



The Very Hungry Caterpillar

In 2007, the Read for Health Initiative provided materials that included banners, pencils, reading records, stickers, bookmarks and plastic bags related to *"The Very Hungry Caterpillar"* book. Three-thousand English and 1000 Spanish *"The Very Hungry Caterpillar"* books were distributed to local WIC agencies. Local WIC agencies have used these Caterpillar materials in several ways that include:

- Palm Beach County used *"The Very Hungry Caterpillar"* materials with banners displayed, offering the bookmarks to WIC children. They were able to develop bulletin boards in clinic waiting rooms emphasizing the theme.
- Other agencies have acknowledged the receipt of the books in local newspapers, radio, and discussed the topic on local television shows. Community partners were also informed about the receipt of the book.
- One agency shared the materials with the local Healthy Start Coalitions.
- *"The Very Hungry Caterpillar"* materials were used at local health fairs.
- Another agency put a sticker on each book that was distributed. The sticker credited the Read for Health Initiative for their generosity.



Orange County
WIC



6.

Why Family Literacy?

Family literacy directly affects the role and effectiveness of parents in helping their children learn. If parents understand the language and literacy lessons their children learn, they can more easily provide the experiences necessary for their children to succeed. Bringing parents and children together is the core of family literacy. Do you remember the magic of your first book? Perhaps you were nestled in the arms of a parent, or sharing a giggle with a friend. Whatever your first memory of a book, books are a powerful tool; they stir the senses, inspire the imagination and spark a love of reading that can last a lifetime. Children feel safe and loved when they read aloud with their caregivers. The real power is in the minutes spent together. Caregivers need to be encouraged to set aside time each day to read to their children. The routine and comfort gives something to count on in a world where there is less and less we can predict.



Children feel safe and loved when they read aloud with their caregivers.

Why Health Literacy?

According to the Center for Health Care Strategies, approximately 50 percent of adults in the United States read at the eighth grade

level or less. It is reported that in health care settings, 55 percent of clients read below a fifth grade level. Thousands of parents have their health care compromised by low literacy and poor understanding of health maintenance. The segments of the population with the lowest level of literacy skills include African Americans, Hispanics, and Native Americans. These segments are also the populations with the most disparity in and access to health care.

It has been said that to promote health, promote mothers' health literacy. The most fundamental way to promote both mother and child health is to promote mother's health literacy during pregnancy and early parenting. In the birth to age three periods, mothers demonstrate a readiness to learn well above national norms. They are "information hungry." Most are using significant health services for the first time and beginning to make healthcare decisions for themselves, their children, husband and parents. An investment in a mother's health literacy is highly leveraged. It pays off in terms of health status, learning and quality of life for the mother and all members of her family throughout their lifetimes. It pays off in terms of lower costs for healthcare services,

higher quality of care and better outcomes in the healthcare system. It may be a key to reducing health disparities. Information can enable mothers to make better use of health services, link them to community services, follow treatment plans, engage in self-care and promote child development.

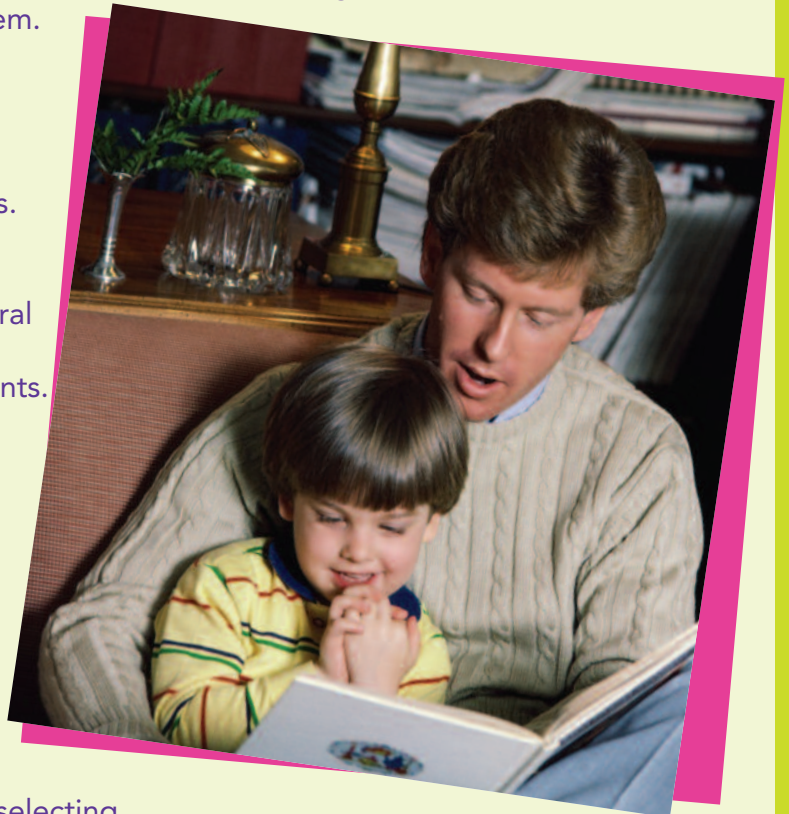
Literacy skills are directly linked with a person's ability to access and understand health information and services. Low literacy leads to poor health, higher incidence of chronic disease, higher rates of mortality, and a shorter life expectancy. Ineffective communications between health providers and clients can result in medical errors due to misinformation about medications and self-care instructions. The good news is there are steps you can take to minimize this problem.

- Don't use medical jargon as you interact with clients.
- Use simple, easy to understand words when speaking with clients.
- Use drawings and visual aids to explain.
- Repeat information verbally several times.
- Encourage reading with your clients.

What can you do to promote literacy?

In clinic waiting areas, promote reading by:

- Provide reading materials for children.
- Use posters to promote reading.
- Consider cultural diversity when selecting reading materials.
- Develop a book collection program.



Resources

1. http://www.literacycenter.net/lessonview_en.htm
2. Berkman ND, DeWalt DA, Pignone MP, ET, al (2004) Literacy and Health Outcomes Evidence Report: Technology Assessment No 87 AHRQ publication No 04-E—7-2 Rockville, MD: Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality
3. Sandras@beginningguides.net
4. National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (2000). Report of the National Reading Panel. Teaching Children to Read: An Evidence-Based Assessment of the Scientific Research Literature on Reading.
5. Zaslow, MJ, Hair, EC, Dion, MR, Ahluwalia SK, and Sargent J, 2001. Maternal Depressive Symptoms and Low Literacy as Potential Barriers to Employment in a Sample of Families Receiving Welfare: Are There Two-Generational Implications? In Women & Health 32 (3):211-251.

