

Health literacy in integrative medicine: Key insights from a patient-user survey

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Abstract

Objectives

- Survey users of an integrative medicine health technology platform to establish baseline health literacy levels; determine the most common and trustworthy sources of health information; and inquire about educational behaviors, needs, preferences, and barriers

Results

Health literacy levels

- 54.1% and ≥ 45.2% rated their overall and topic-specific health knowledge as “moderately knowledgeable.”
- 71.5% of participants “strongly agree” that educational materials provided by their healthcare provider are easy to understand.
- 80.6% (average) of participants “strongly agreed” that (a) they understood why their provider recommended their treatment plan, (b) they understood the treatment plan instructions, (c) they felt they could easily carry out the treatment plan instructions, and (d) they felt comfortable asking their provider questions about their health and treatment plan.
- 49.9% and 24.3% of participants either “somewhat” or “strongly agree” that reliable online health information is easy to find.

Most common and trustworthy sources of health information

- 80.1% of participants consider their healthcare provider a trustworthy source of information.
- 71.8% of participants source their health information from their healthcare provider.

Barriers to finding reliable health information

- 55.5% of participants selected “I’m not sure where to find reliable health information.”
- 32.9% of participants selected “I don’t have enough time to look for health information.”

Educational needs and preferences

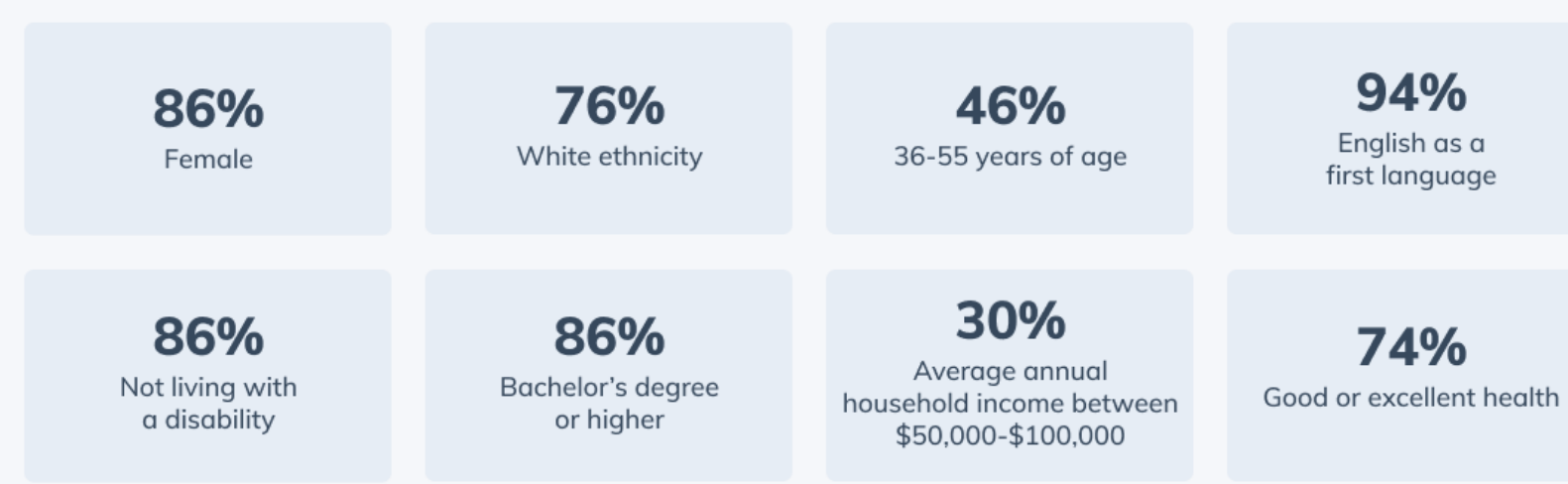
- 45.3% and 51.1% of participants prefer short- (< 5min) to medium-length (5–20min) educational materials, respectively.
- 59.6% of participants prefer written educational materials.

Methodology

- An email invitation to participate in a 28-question survey was sent to patient users (n=30,000) who had been invited to an integrative medicine health technology platform (Fullscript), opened an account, and received a treatment recommendation within the last six months.
- To gather a representative sample of respondents using the integrative medicine health technology platform, 69% of email invitations were sent to patients seeing chiropractors, medical doctors, naturopathic doctors, nurse practitioners, and doctors of osteopathy. The remaining 31% of email invitations were sent to patients seeing other practitioner modalities (e.g., nutritionists, dietitians, acupuncturists, health coaches).
- Patients were not required to have placed an order through the platform to be eligible for participation.
- The survey was open for eight days.
- Participation incentives included being entered in a draw to win a \$200 USD gift card to Amazon.com (provided to the first-place winner) or five priority shipping credits on the integrative medicine health technology platform (provided to second- and third-place winners).
- Data was collected and analyzed using the SurveyMonkey software.
- Using Google Sheets, several secondary stratification analyses were conducted to determine whether there were any associated links.

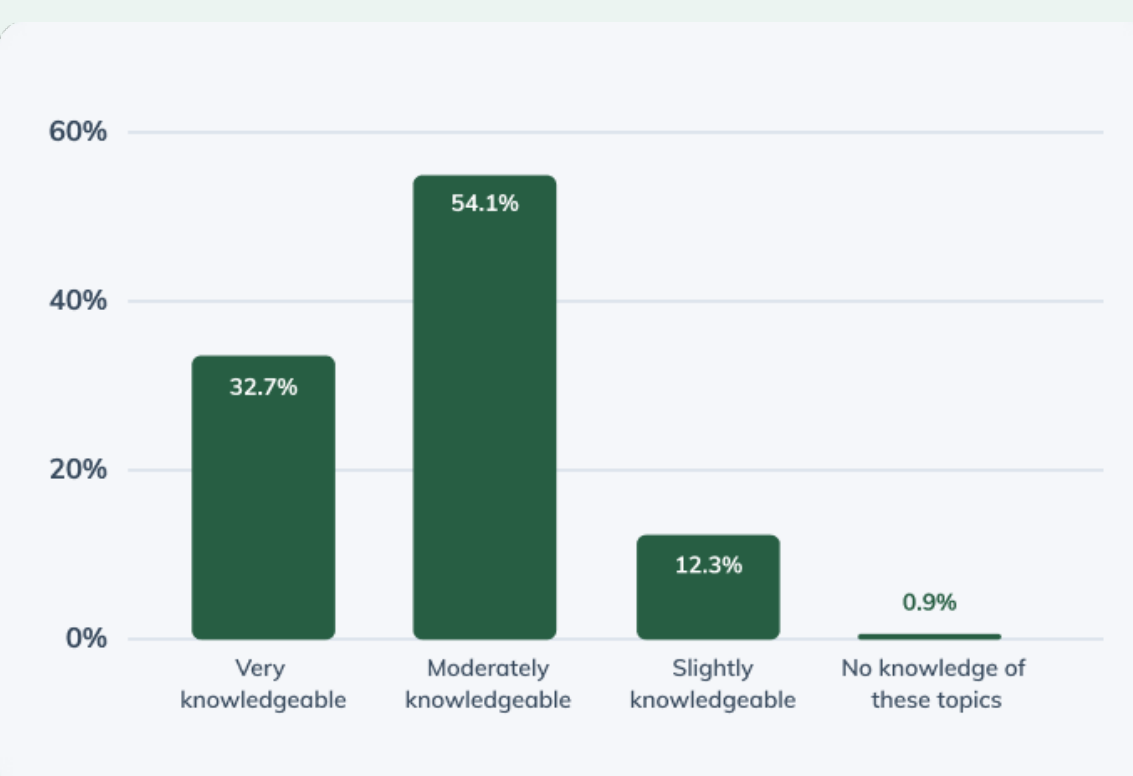
Results

Demographic information (n=911)

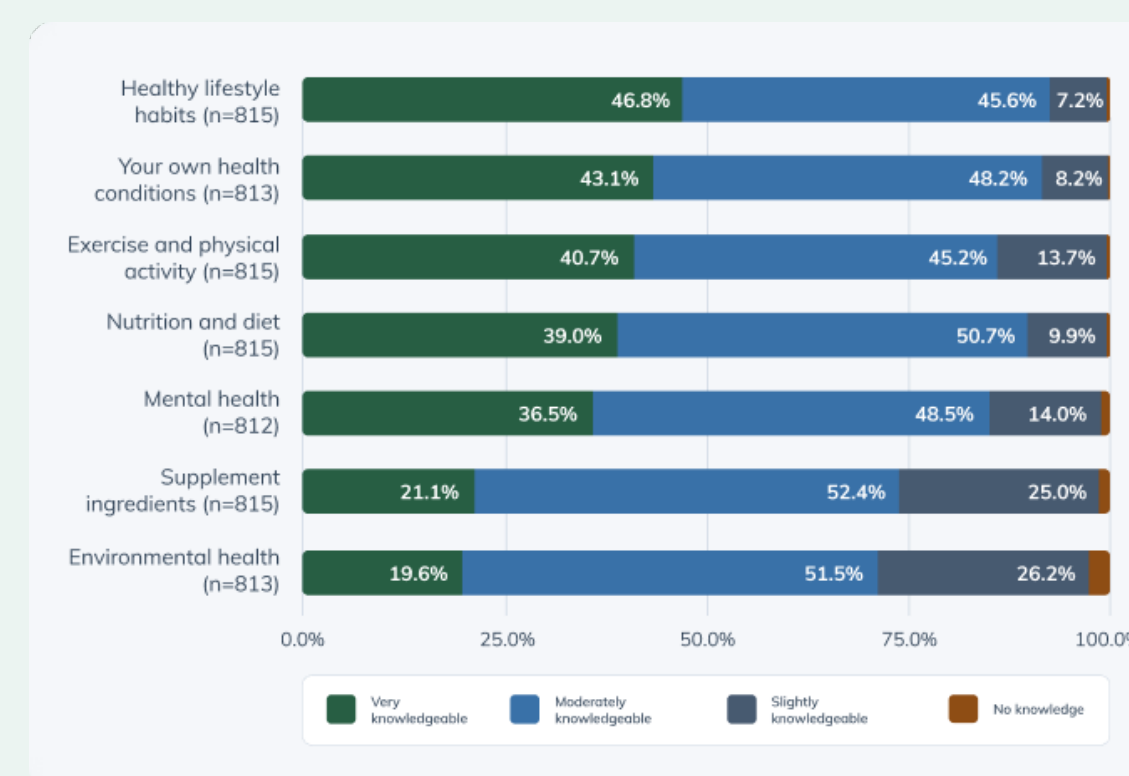


Self-perceived levels of health knowledge

How would you rate your overall level of health knowledge? (n=813)

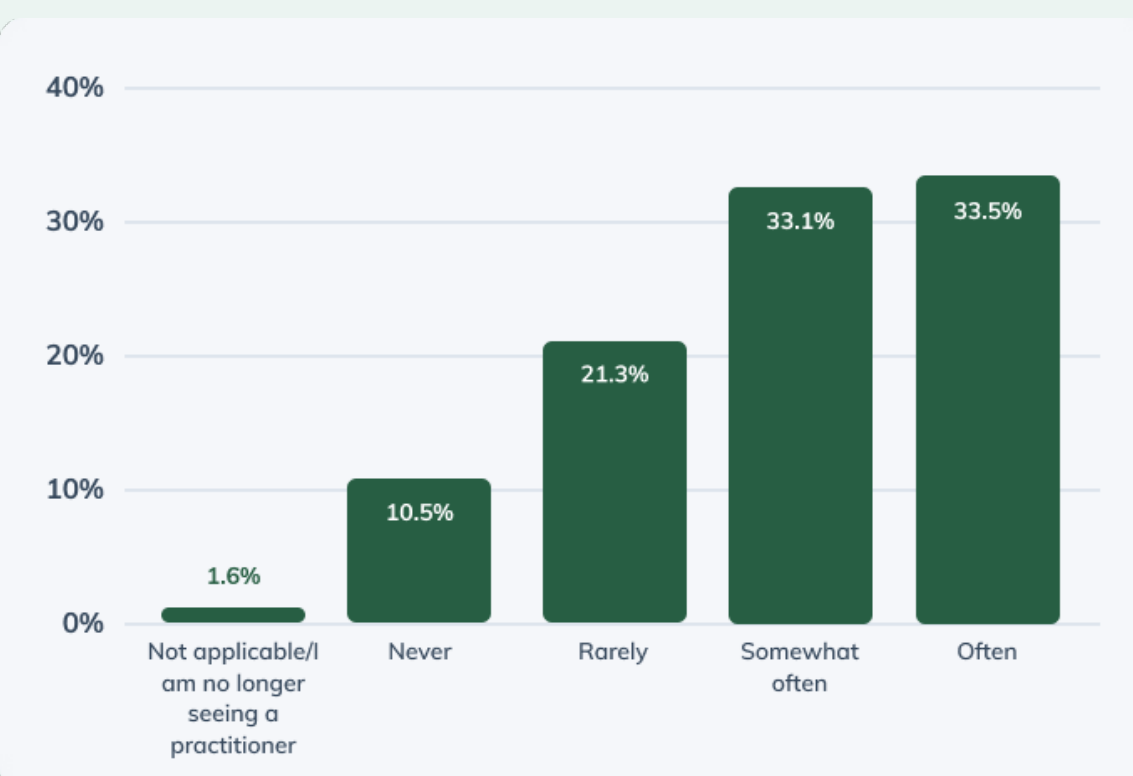


Rate your level of knowledge for each health topic individually.

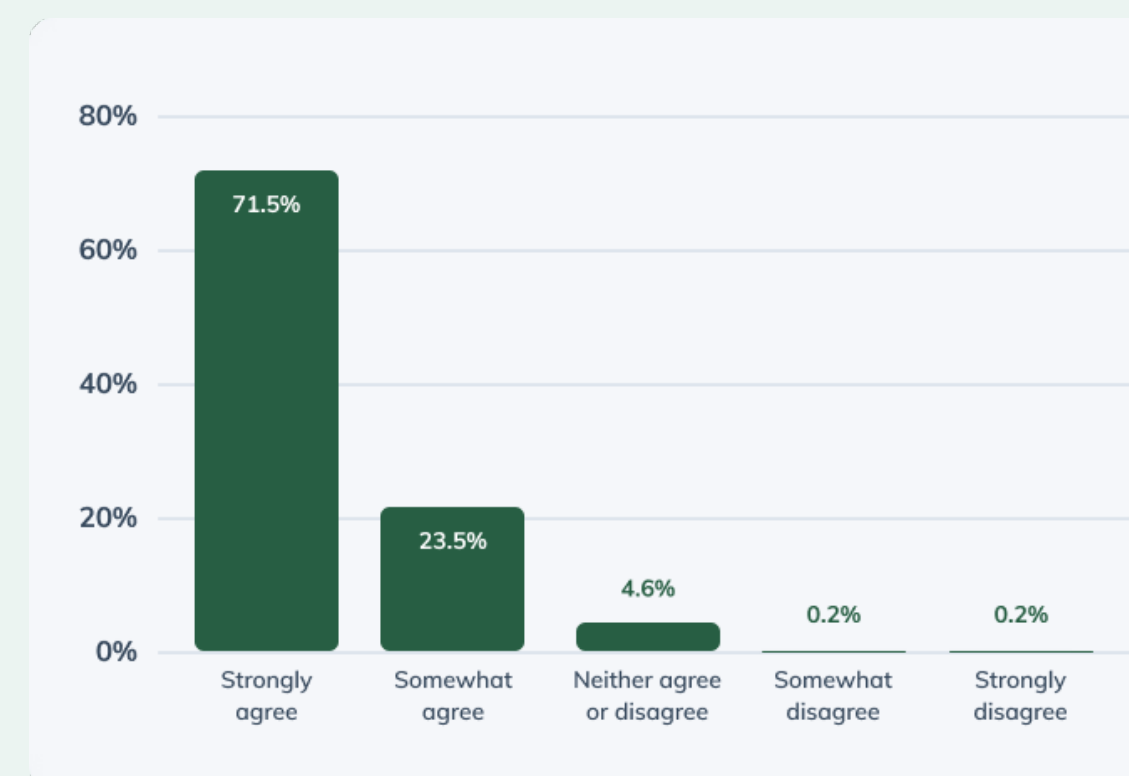


Health literacy in an integrative medicine clinical setting

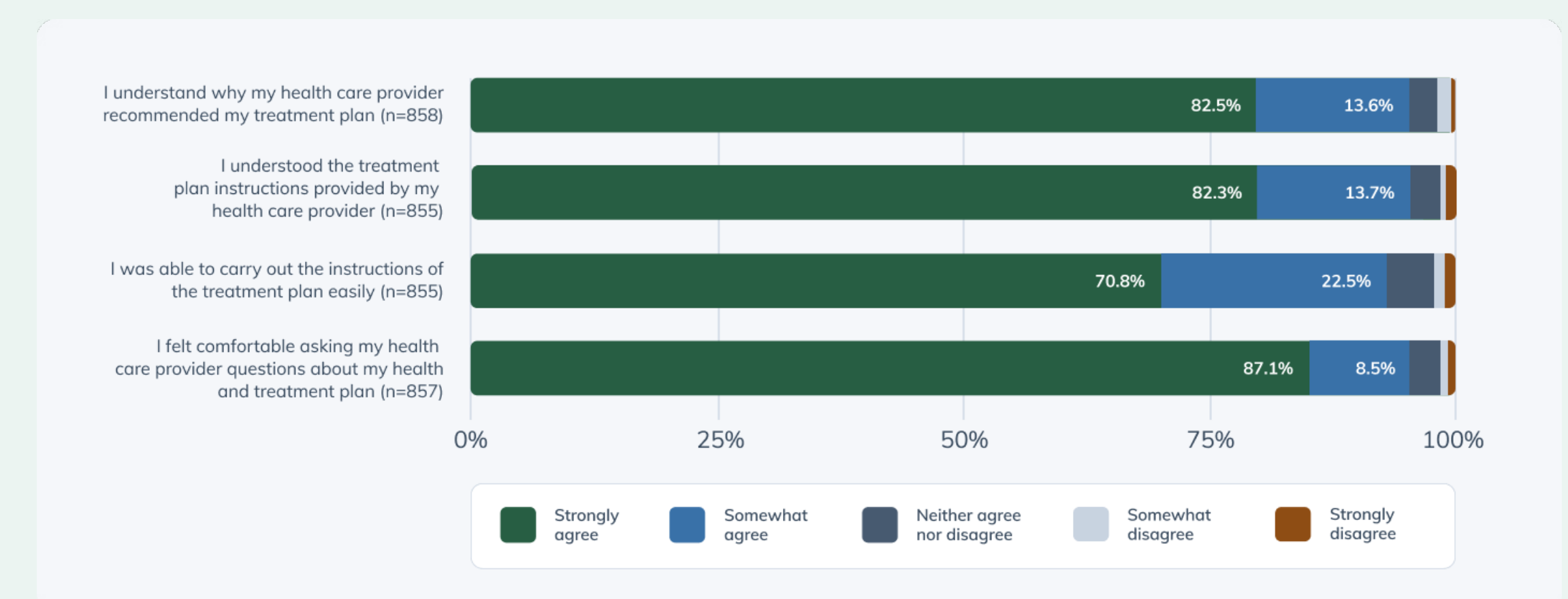
How often does your healthcare provider provide you with educational materials to read, listen to, or watch outside your clinical appointments? (n=856)



How strongly do you agree with the following statement: “The educational materials provided by my healthcare provider are easy to understand.”? (n=544)

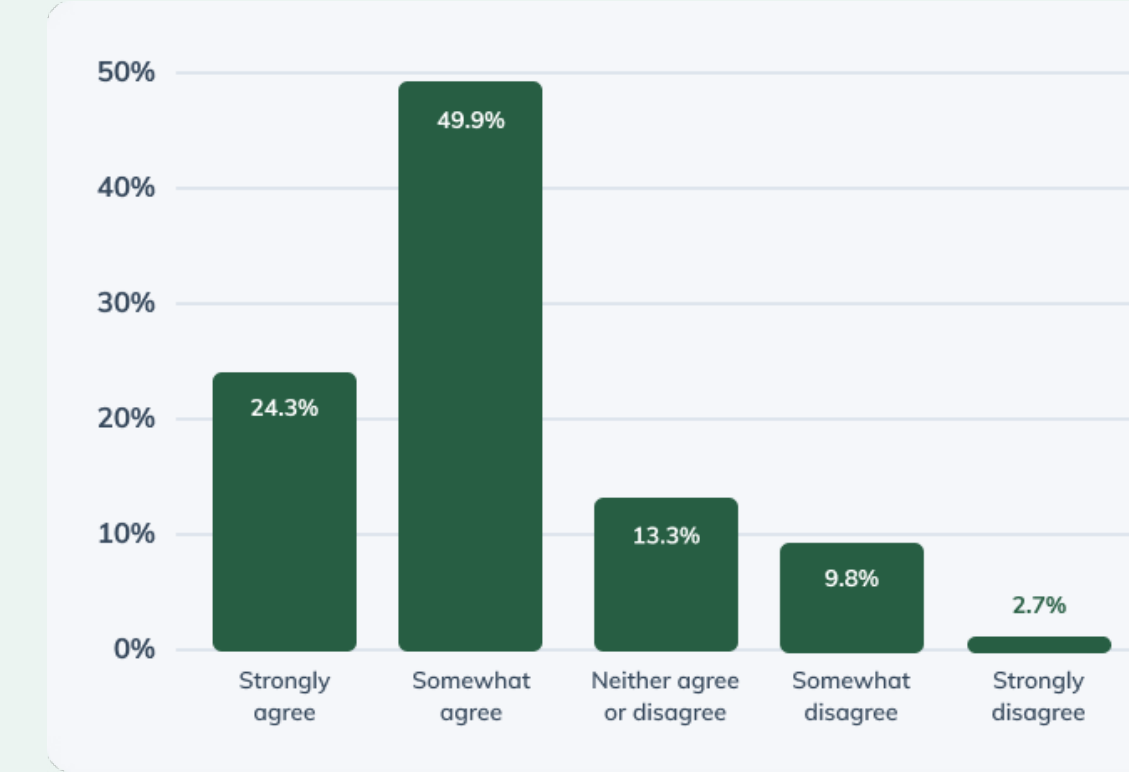


Thinking back to your most recent appointment with your healthcare provider, how strongly do you agree with the following statements as they relate to your treatment plan?

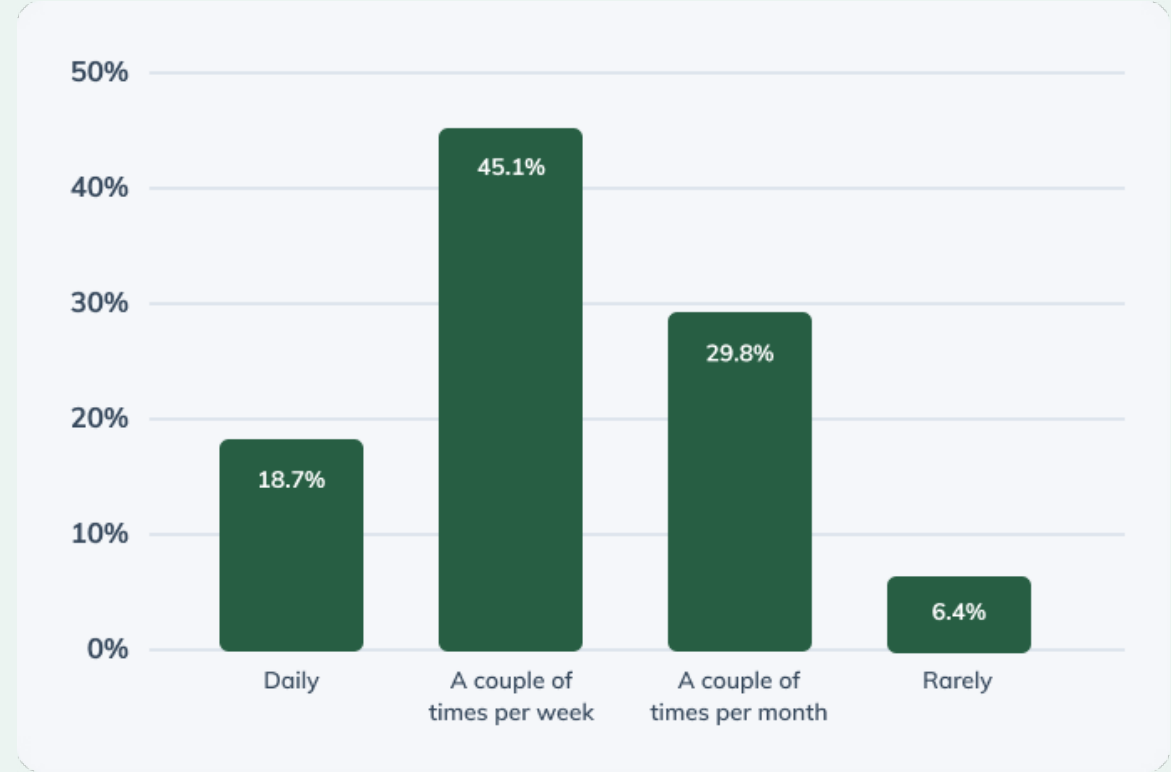


Finding health information

How strongly do you agree with the following statement: “I can easily find reliable health information online.”? (n=814)

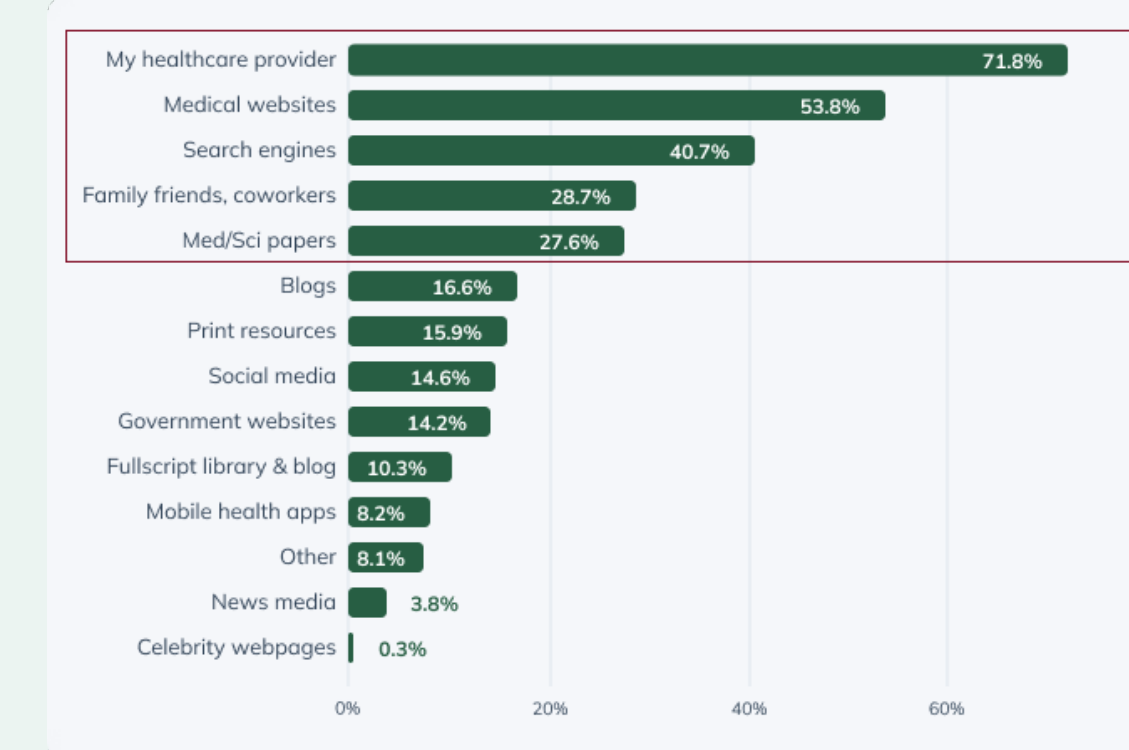


How often do you seek out (search or look for) health-related information or educational content? (n=793)

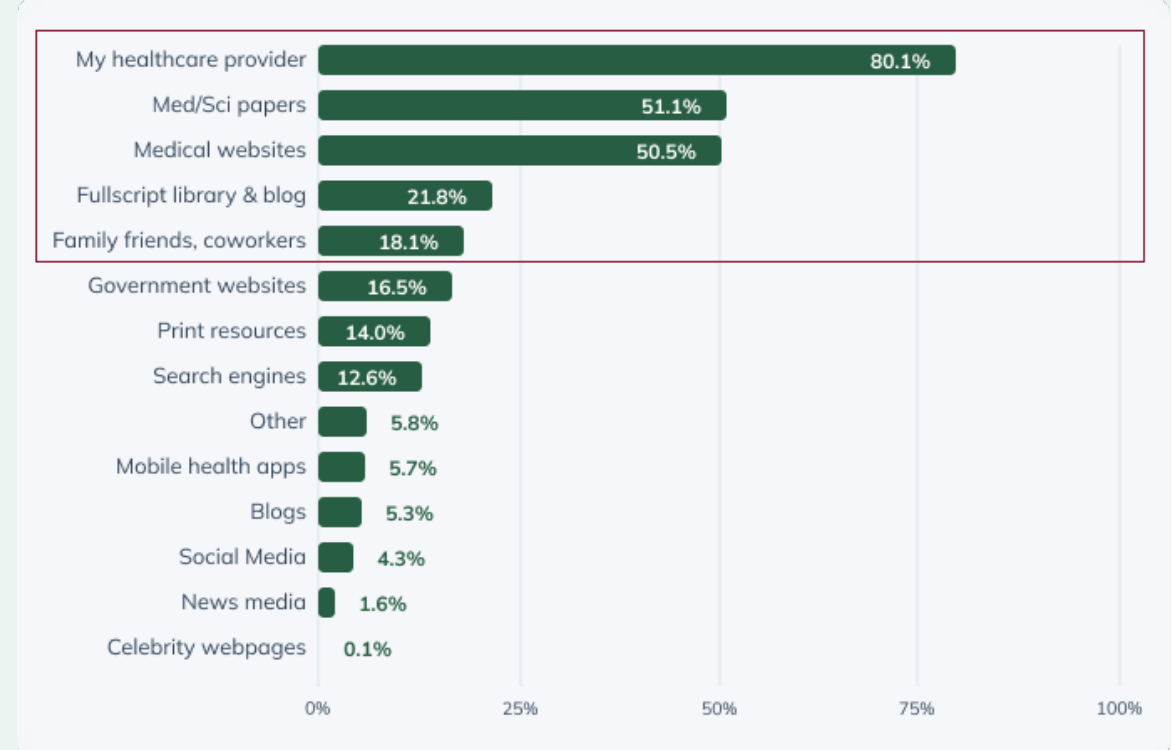


Most common and trusted sources of health information

Where do you get most of your health information from? (n=794)

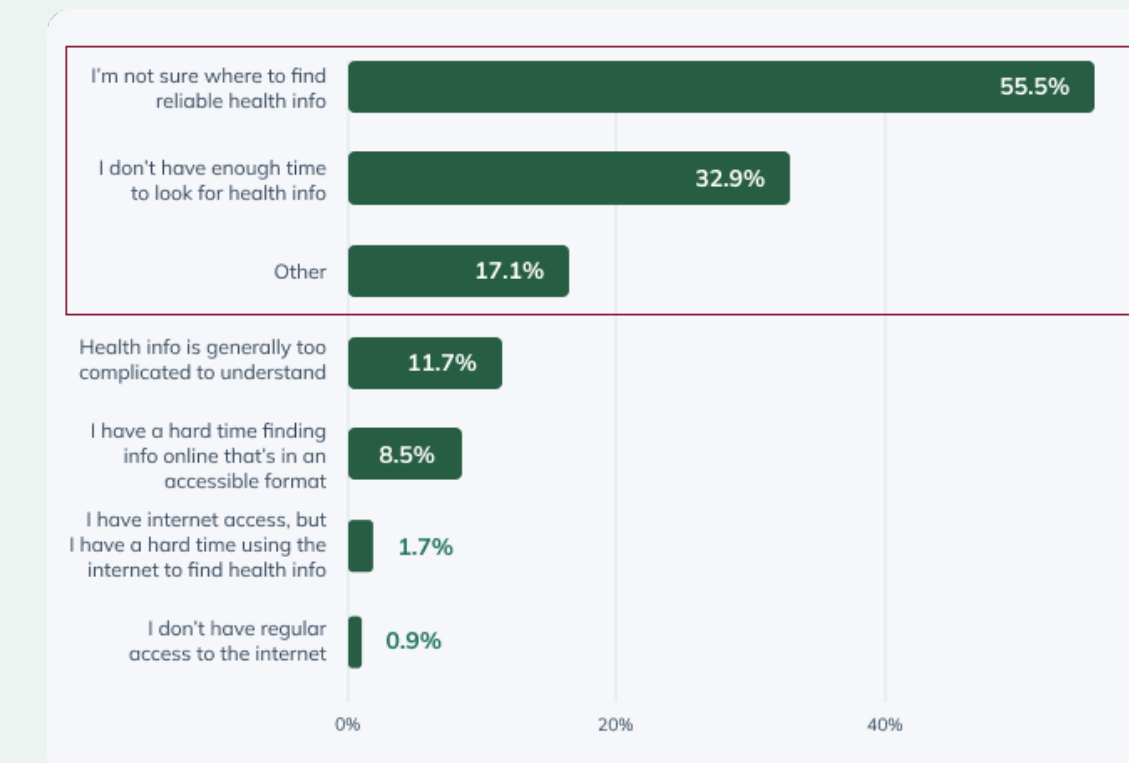


Choose three of the following sources of health information you consider to be the most trustworthy. (n=792)



Barriers to searching for health information

What barriers prevent you from searching for or finding health information? (n=750)

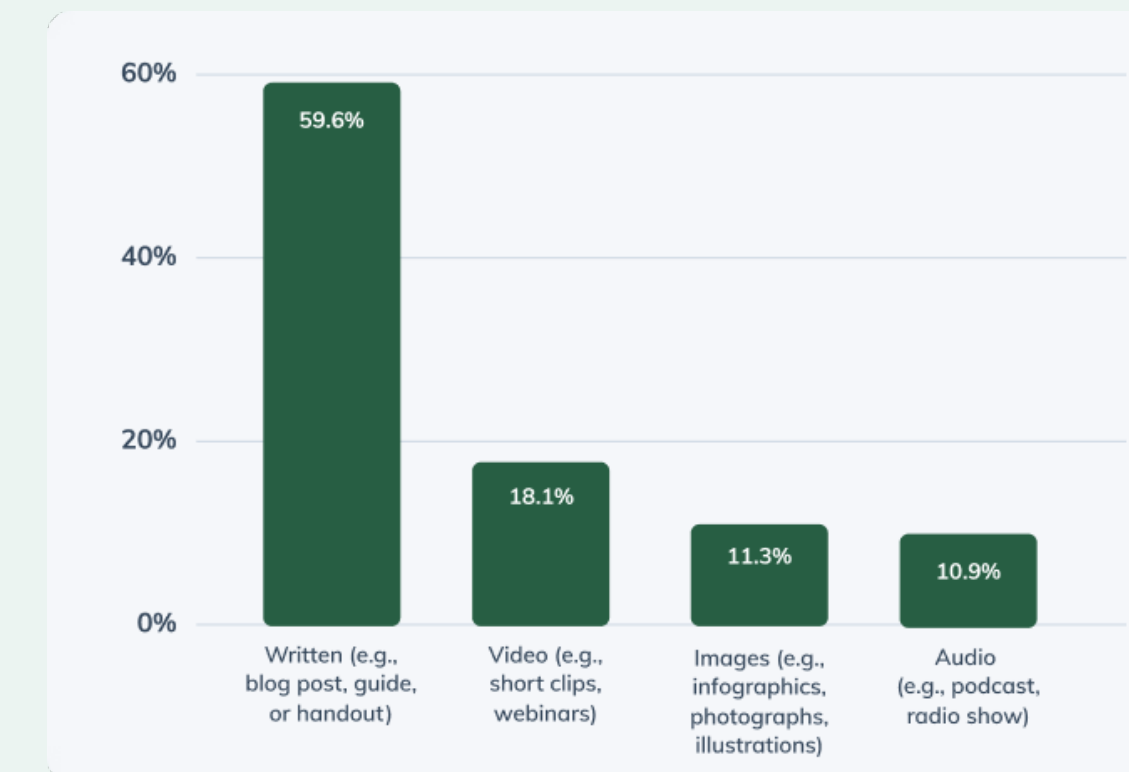


Other:

- Not being able to trust the information
- Condition-specific barriers (e.g., brain fog)
- Feeling overwhelmed by the amount of information
- Lack of motivation to triple-check information
- Not having free access to medical journals
- Not being able to find reliable studies

Educational preferences

What delivery format do you most prefer to receive health information? (n=758)



What length of health education content do you prefer most? (n=760)



Background

What is health literacy?

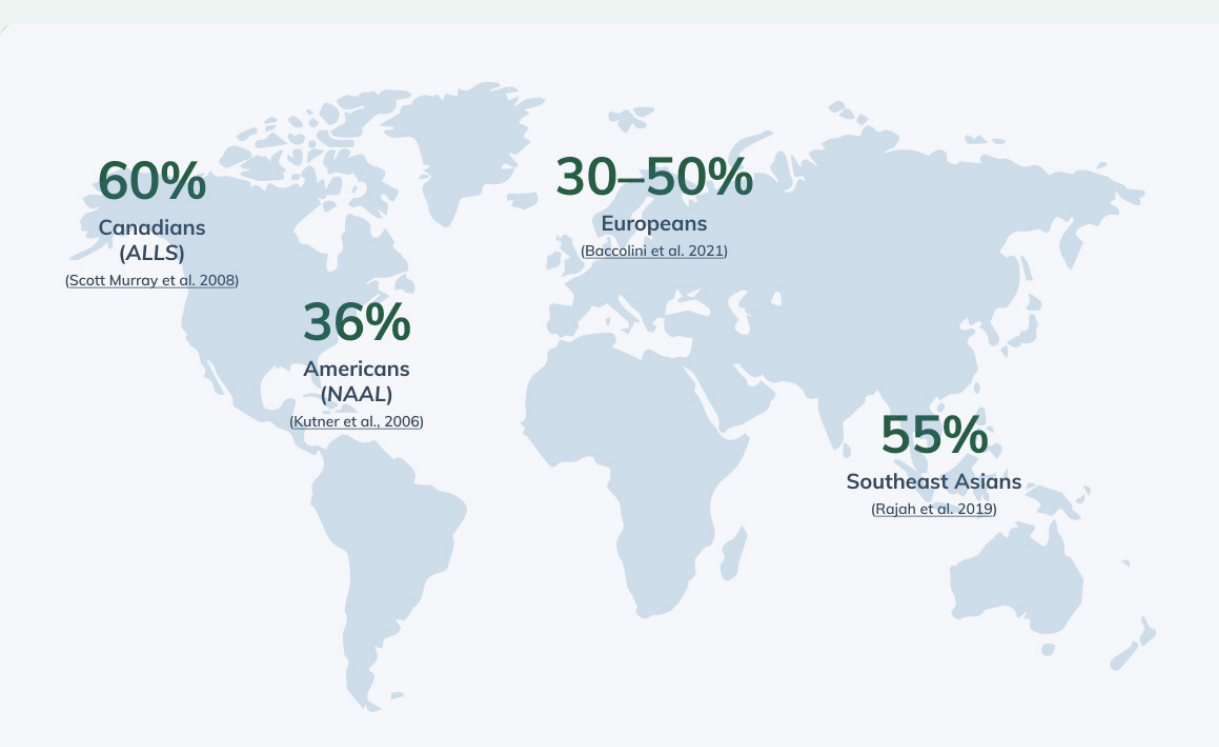
Personal health literacy

The degree to which individuals have the ability to find, understand, and use information and services to inform health-related decisions and actions for themselves and others

Organizational health literacy

The degree to which organizations equitably enable individuals to find, understand, and use information and services to inform health-related decisions and actions for themselves and others (History of Health Literacy Definitions 2022)

How prevalent is low health literacy?



The causal pathway between health literacy and health outcomes



Conclusion

- The patient users of the integrative medicine health technology platform appear to have high health literacy.
- The top two barriers to searching for and finding reliable online health information were (1) not knowing where to look and (2) not having enough time.
- Healthcare providers are the most common and trustworthy source of health information.

Take-home message: Healthcare practitioners should continue or start providing patients with health education and high-quality, easy-to-understand educational resources during their clinical appointments.

Limitations

- The response rate was low (911 out of 30,000).
- The survey was only available in English.
- The survey may not have been in an accessible format.
- Health literacy level was self-reported.