**American Family Physician Patient Handout Instructions**

WHEN CREATING A PATIENT EDUCATION HANDOUT…

• Try to write at no higher than a sixth-grade level. You can check readability statistics by using the Proofing options available within the MS Word Spelling and Grammar tool.

• You can lower the reading level by avoiding words of more than two syllables,

writing short sentences and paragraphs (two to three sentences), and using bulleted lists.

• Content should focus on what patients need to know rather than on what it would be nice for them to know. Less information is usually better than more.

• Information should focus on what patients need to do to manage or treat their medical condition.

**Remember, you don’t need to cover everything—emphasize what’s important.**

* When writing a patient education handout, keep the patient in mind. Use simple words, avoid jargon, talk directly to the patient, and explain things as you might to your grandmother or a friend.
* Keep it short. Aim for about 400 words for a one-page handout, or about 750 words for a two-page handout.
* Keep it simple. Use short sentences (fewer than 12 words) and short paragraphs (two to three sentences). Use common, one- or two-syllable words. Use transition words, such as next, then, first, and finally. Limit the use of medical terms. If you do use a medical term (because it’s something a patient might hear in relation to their condition), be sure to explain what it means.
* Make it personal. Address the handout directly to the patient. Use “you” frequently. Imagine how you would address a patient sitting in your office.
* Be specific. Write “Drink 8 ounces of water at least four times a day,” rather than “Drink plenty of fluids.” Or, “Do not lift anything heavier than 5 pounds,” rather than “Avoid heavy lifting.”
* Avoid generalities such as: "Cut down on fatty foods," or "Exercise more."
* Keep it focused. Include the key points. Avoid extraneous detail. Keep it practical.
* Make it informative. Tell the patient the key things that most people would like to know about the condition.
* Organize it. Use headings to organize and highlight the information.
* Make it user-friendly. Use an appropriate format—question and answer, set of instructions, or standard discussion about the condition and its diagnosis and treatment.
* Illustrate it. Include copies of simple drawings if that would help make a point, such as specific exercises for knee rehabilitation.

INSTRUCTION SHEET FORMAT (e.g., exercises, diets, medication directions, wellness tips, etc.):

Title: What to do for X. Subtitle: such as Diet, Exercise, Wellness Tips, Taking your Medicine

Outline the basic steps in the program of exercise, diet, or other therapy. List what to avoid, if applicable.

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