

Making Numbers Matter: Present and Future Research in Risk Communication

Angela Fagerlin, PhD; Peter A. Ubel, MD; Dylan M. Smith, PhD
Brian J. Zikmund-Fisher, PhD

Objective: To summarize existing research on individual numeracy and methods for presenting risk information to patients. **Methods:** We selectively retrieved articles from MEDLINE and the *Social Sciences Citation Index*. **Results:** Many Americans have low numeracy skills, a deficit that impedes effective health care. Approaches to risk communication vary in current practice, but how risks are presented can significantly affect both patients' risk perceptions and

their knowledge. **Conclusions:** Adhering to some basic principles for presenting risk information to patients can improve understanding. However, different risk-communication methods may be needed for individuals with high versus low levels of numeracy.

Key words: numeracy, decision aids, graphs, visual displays, informed consent, shared decision making, patient education

Am J Health Behav. 2007;31(Suppl 1):S47-S56
