

Health Literacy Assessment of Colonoscopy Bowel Prep Instructions in California

Health Literacy Annual Research Conference - Oct 19, 2026 - Gary Ashwal, MA - gary@garyashwal.com

BACKGROUND

- Colonoscopy is the gold standard for colorectal cancer screening.¹
- Patients can have difficulty understanding bowel prep instructions.²
- Some clinics use health literacy principles to prevent confusion, improve bowel prep, and reduce cancellations.³

RESEARCH QUESTION

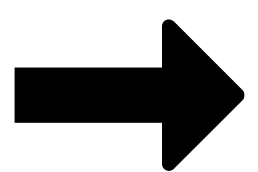
How consistently are health literacy principles applied in bowel prep instructions used by gastroenterology (GI) clinics in California?

METHODS

- 86 bowel prep instructions were collected from GI clinic websites in California.
- Instructions were evaluated with software and by manual review using a set of predefined criteria.
- The structured rubric was designed to reflect a range of health literacy principles and support reproducible assessment across many documents.

DATA & REFERENCES

Scan QR code

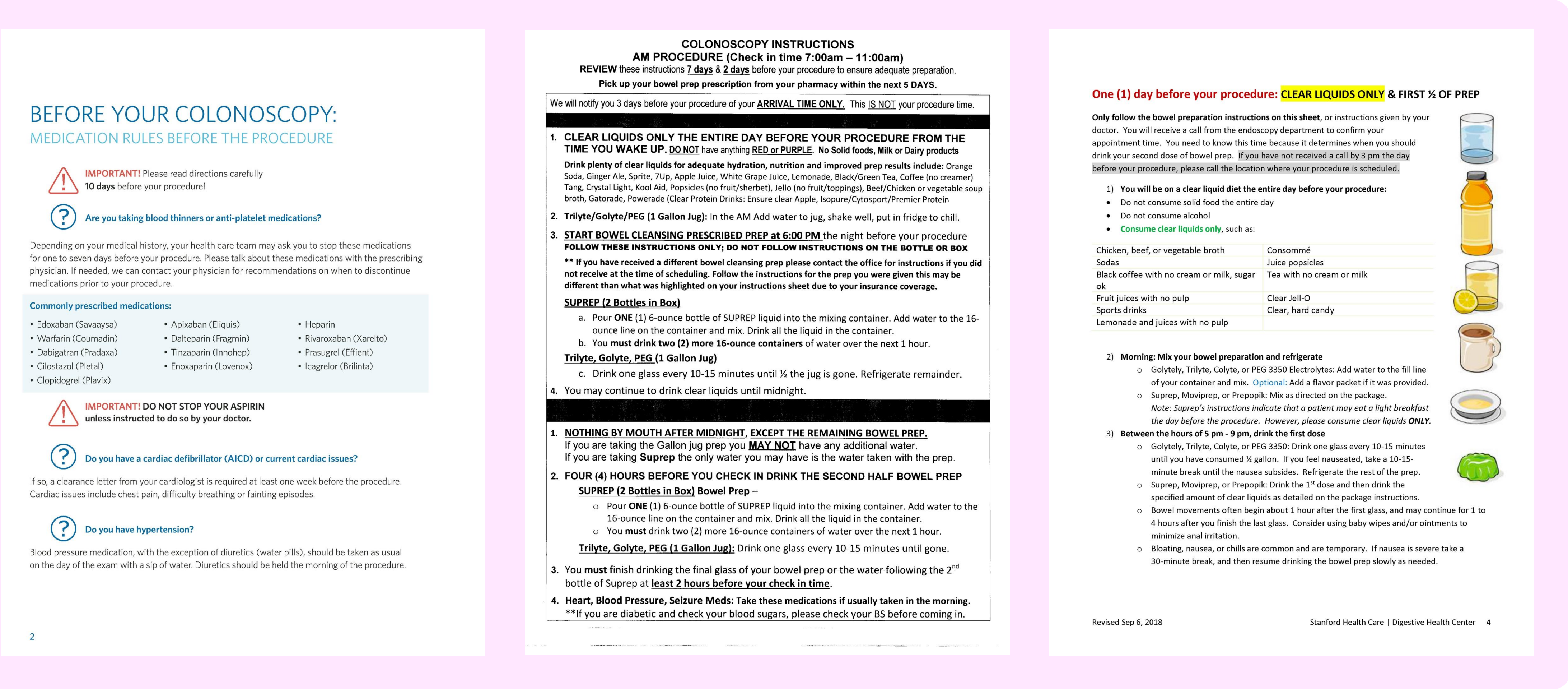


RESULTS

	Pass Criteria	Pass		Fail	
Reading Level	SMOG ⁴ < 7 th grade	2	2%	84	98%
Plain Language	No “nothing by mouth” in the text	67	78%	19	22%
	No “prior to” in the text	14	16%	72	84%
	No “approximately” in the text	62	72%	24	28%
	No “discontinue” in the text	68	79%	18	21%
Visual Aid	Any informational visual	39	45%	47	55%
Information Density	No font sizes < 12 points	9	10%	77	90%
	No margins < 0.5 inches	58	67%	28	33%
	No pages > 2,200 characters	46	53%	40	47%
Contact Information	Includes phone number	77	90%	9	10%
Update Frequency	Last review was 2020 or later	18	21%	68	79%

CONCLUSION

Health literacy principles are not consistently applied. Every document in the study could be improved in content or layout. It is not clear how often clinics review instructions.



Example 1

Example 2

Example 3