

Health equity content guide

When health content is inclusive, it's more accurate and effective. The goal of this guide is to maximize accessibility, relevance, and respect in all content we produce for our clients.

Our audiences are highly diverse in age, gender, race, ethnicity, culture, sexual orientation, social determinants of health, family makeup, and physical ability. For content to be effective, readers must be able to identify with it and recognize how it applies to them. Inclusive language and imagery help build those connections.

Inclusive content also signals acceptance or nonjudgement. When used in a clinical setting, it strengthens the patient-clinician relationship and enhances patient experience overall.

Following these inclusivity guidelines helps ensure that everyone can see themselves in our content, making them more likely to engage, learn, and take the right steps for better health.



The language guide

Sex and gender

Sex is biological. It's about your chromosomes, your anatomy, and your hormones. In terms of sex, most people are male or female.

Gender is social. It's how your identity relates to society's ideas of what it means to be a man or a woman.

- Only mention sex or gender when relevant, and use the one you mean.
- Avoid reinforcing gender-based stereotypes when possible.
- When gender isn't known, or isn't relevant, use singular *they*.

Related terms:

- Gender-nonconforming: Acceptable for people who do not conform to gender expectations.
- Nonbinary: Do not use interchangeably with *transgender*. People are nonbinary if their gender is not strictly male or female.
- Transgender: People whose gender does not match the sex they were identified as having at birth.
- *Gender confirmation surgery* is acceptable. Do not use *sex change* or *sex reassignment surgery*.



Person-first language

Focus on the person, not the condition (not diabetic, but person with diabetes; not alcoholic, but person with alcohol use disorder)

Words to use	Words to avoid
People of color	Non-white
Black, African American	Inner-city, ghetto, urban
White	Caucasian
Asian, of Asian descent	Oriental
Child/teen/person	Boy/girl/man/woman
Parent	Husband/wife Mother/father
If your child has a uterus/vagina/ovaries If your child menstruates/ovulates/ produces sperm If your child has a penis/testicles	Procedure-specific vagina or penis
Child/children/grandchild	Son/daughter
Children in your family, sibling	Brother/sister
Gender confirmation surgery	Sex change, sex reassignment surgery
Older adults, older people	Elderly, the aged, seniors
Ages XX and older	Geriatric
Differently abled	Disabled
Has, lives with	Suffers from, victim of, afflicted by
Physical disability	Handicapped
Uses a wheelchair	Wheelchair-bound
Intellectual disability or developmental disability; learning problems	Mental retardation
Different sex	Opposite sex



Negative cultural references:

- Lowest rung on the totem pole
- Grandfather/ing
- Circle the wagons
- On the warpath
- Cakewalk
- Brown bag
- Redline/ing
- Spirit animal
- Peanut gallery
- Tar baby

White/black references: Avoid using *white* to mean good and *black* to mean bad.

- whitelist/blacklist
- whitehat/blackhat hackers

Ableist language: Avoid using medical terminology to describe nonmedical situations. Examples:

- Crazy or psycho to mean wild
- Cripples to mean slows
- Falls on deaf ears
- Turn a blind eye
- Blind review
- Sanity-check
- On/off the wagon (in relation to alcoholism)

Body size: Aim for neutral language. Avoid:

- Obese (CDC classification referring to a specific BMI; use only if necessary because of medical topic)
- Morbidly obese (use only if necessary because of medical topic)
- Overweight (CDC classification referring to a specific BMI; use only if necessary because of medical topic)
- Plus size: Some view as an inclusive term, while others encourage avoiding it. With this division on the topic, there are likely better word choice options.
- Slang terms (chunky, big-boned, chubby, portly, pudgy, plump, heavysset, stocky, hefty, flabby, ample, curvy)

Preferred:

- Larger body
- Person of size
- Weight changes

Don't make assumptions about behavior, such as diet and exercise, based on body size.

The art and imagery guide



Our goal is to show real people of all kinds and represent different types of people as equals. We want everyone to be able to see themselves in our images.

Select a range of people that represent different:

- Races/ethnicities
- Genders
- Ages
- Abilities
- Body types
- Sexual orientations
- Socioeconomic backgrounds



While it's unlikely to capture all of these categories, the more types of people represented, the better.



Portray people in a positive and respected manner.

- Avoid stereotyping.
- Ask yourself if you'd want to be portrayed this way, or if you'd object to seeing a friend or family member portrayed this way. (For example, a person of size who looks guilty while eating.)



Consider composition and focus.

- Look at how people are positioned in the image to see if one person is given priority over others.
- Avoid images where women or minorities are supplemental or secondary. Just because a photo includes many types of people doesn't mean they're represented equally or in an inclusive way.
- Choose photos that intentionally put different types of people in the spotlight, allowing them to be the focus.



Represent diversity beyond skin color.

- Clothing, jewelry, head scarves, walking aids, physical environment, and food can be subtle clues to sexual orientation, gender identity, religion, mental health, socioeconomic background, and some physical disabilities.
- Make sure the symbols represent the group accurately. Stock photos are not always correct.

Authenticity is paramount when representing inclusion and diversity.

- Do not digitally alter skin color to give the appearance of racial balance.
- Choose candid poses over staged images. Photos of multiethnic groups/categories may not be conveyed as authentic if engineered. Realness speaks volumes.

Follow alt tag recommendations.

- Alt tags should convey in words the same information that is communicated by the image.
- Should represent the purpose and function of the image, not describe its appearance.
- Should not contain extraneous information to convey the purpose of showing the image. Reference to race, gender, age, body size, ability, or sexual orientation is not required unless it specifically pertains to the purpose and function of the image.

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