

Provide a Health Context for Numbers and Mathematical Concepts

- Health measurements, such as cholesterol or glucose levels, have little meaning to patients unless you put them into a context the patient can understand.
 - > Instead of just telling patients their numbers, give them additional information such as high and low parameters or a goal number. For example, “Your cholesterol level is 305. A healthy cholesterol level would be less than 200, so we need to talk about how we can lower your number...”

Take a Pause

- Medical instructions can be confusing, so slow down and take pauses to give your patient time to digest the information and ask for clarification.

Be an Active Listener

- Active listening means encouraging patients to talk and can be used to gather information.
 - > Allow your patients to tell their story or information they feel is necessary for their visit.

Address Quizzical Looks

- You may notice that your patient sometimes may look confused, stare blankly, or may not seem to be paying attention when you are discussing medical instructions. These may be signs that the patient does not understand what you are explaining.
 - > Rephrase your instructions by using simpler words and concepts, and draw pictures if appropriate. Remember to use the “Teach Back” method to ensure that your patients understand and can communicate what they are going to do when they leave your office.

Create a Welcoming and Supportive Environment

- Patients are most comfortable in an office that feels private and encourages communication.
 - > From the registration desk to the exam room, patients should be encouraged to ask questions. Discussions with the patient, whether it be with you or the nurse, should not be held in front of other staff or patients, but rather covered during his or her private consultation time.

Help Your Patients Succeed

Tips for Improving Communication with Your Patients





Simple and Fast Techniques to Help Your Patients Succeed

Did you know that most patients forget up to 80% of what their doctor tells them as soon as they leave the office, and nearly 50% of what they do remember is recalled incorrectly?

By using clear health communication techniques, you can help your patients to better understand their condition and follow your instructions for better health outcomes.

Help Patients Remember Your Instructions With the “Teach Back” Method

- The “Teach Back” Method is simply asking your patients to repeat *in their own words* what they need to do when they leave your office. This method allows you to check your patient’s understanding of your medical instructions.
- You do not want your patients to view the Teach Back task as a test, but rather how well you explained the concept. You can place the responsibility on yourself by using this suggested language:
“I want to be sure that I did a good job explaining your blood pressure medications, because this can be confusing. Can you tell me what changes we decided to make and how you will now take the medications?”
- If your patient is not able to repeat the information accurately, try to rephrase the information, rather than just repeat it. Then, ask the patient to repeat the instructions again until you feel comfortable that the patient really understands the information.



What Else Can You Do to Increase Your Patients’ Understanding?

Use Visual Aids and Illustrations

- Many people remember information better when it is presented to them visually. You can draw simple pictures or diagrams to help explain your instructions.

Beware of Words With Multiple Meanings

- Always clarify the meaning of words that can be interpreted in more than one way.
 - > “Stool,” “gait” and “dressing” are words that can have different meanings depending on how they are used in a sentence. When possible, try to use words that have only one meaning, or be sure to clarify the meaning of a confusing word.

Avoid Acronyms and Other New Words

- Acronyms such as “CAT scan” and “HDL” are common to you, but some of your patients may not understand them.
 - > Say or write the complete phrase the first time you use it, then explain the meaning. For example, you can explain that “HDL” means “the good cholesterol.”

Use Idioms Carefully

- When possible, you should try to avoid using idioms unless you’re sure the patient understands the meaning.
 - > For example, instead of asking “I understand that you’ve been feeling blue,” a better choice of words would be “I understand that you’ve been feeling sad lately.”