

Teach Back

Strategies for Effective Communication

“Asking for patients to recall and restate what they have been told is one of 11 top patient safety practices based on the strength of scientific evidence.”¹

Research shows that patients understand and remember less than half of what healthcare providers explain to them. **Teach back** is an effective method to check for understanding.

Teach back:

- Creates a dialogue in which the provider gives information and then asks the patient to respond and confirm his or her understanding before adding any new information.
- Requires patients to repeat, **in their own words**, what they need to know or do, in a non-shaming way.
- Is **not** a test of the patient, but of how well the provider explained a concept.
- Is a chance to verify understanding and, if necessary, re-teach the information.

This is what
I HEARD.

This is what
I MEANT.

Basic strategies include:

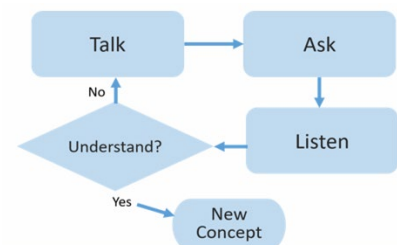
- Re-phrasing information if a patient is not able to repeat the information accurately.
- Asking the patient to teach back the information, using their own words, as many times as necessary until it is clear that the patient really understands it.
- Considering other approaches if the patient still does not demonstrate understanding.
- **Not asking** yes/no questions, such as:
 - ✗ “Do you understand?”
 - ✗ “Do you have any questions?”
- Using “chunk and check” if more than one concept is being explained.
 - ✓ Teach the two or three main points for the first concept and use teach back to check for understanding before going on to the next concept.
 - ✓ Teach the two or three main points for the next concept and use teach back to check for understanding.

Prompt patients to demonstrate understanding, using their own words:

- “I want to be sure I explained everything clearly. Can you please explain it back to me so I can be sure I did?”
- “What will you tell your husband about the changes we made to your blood pressure medicines today?”
- “We’ve gone over a lot of information; a lot of things you can do to get more exercise in your day. In your own words, please review what we talked about. How will you make it work at home?”

When talking to patients and families always:

- Use plain language.
- Speak slowly and clearly.
- Break complex information down into short statements.
- Focus on the two or three most important concepts.
- Check for understanding using teach back.



Source: Health Literacy Universal Precautions Toolkit. AHRQ Pub. No. 10-0046-EF