

The Teach-Back Method

Overview

Studies have shown that 40-80 percent of the medical information patients receive is forgotten immediately¹ and nearly half of the information retained is incorrect.² One of the easiest ways to close the gap of communication between clinician and patient is to employ the “teach-back” method, also known as the “show-me” method or “closing the loop.”³ **Teach-back is a way to confirm that you have explained to the patient what they need to know in a manner that the patient understands.** Patient understanding is confirmed when they explain it back to you. It can also help the clinic staff members identify explanations and communication strategies that are most commonly understood by patients.

Purpose

To provide your practice with examples and helpful advice on performing the teach-back method.

Action

1. Learn the teach-back method.

- [Teach-Back Video](#) : View a 5-minute video that gives two examples of using teach-back with medication changes.

Testimonial

“I decided to do teach-back on five patients. With one mother and her child, I concluded the visit by saying ‘So tell me what you are going to do when you get home.’ The mother just looked at me without a reply. She could not tell me what instructions I had just given her. I explained the instructions again and then she was able to teach them back to me. The most amazing thing about this “ah ha” moment was that I had no idea she did not understand until I asked her to teach it back to me. I was so wrapped up in delivering the message that I did not realize that it wasn’t being received.”

-resident physician, pediatric office

- **Teach-Back: A Health Literacy Tool to Ensure Patient Understanding:**  This PowerPoint presentation can be used in a group setting or as a stand-alone self-study. It contains 20 slides developed by clinicians at the Iowa Health System.
- **AMA video:**  View a video entitled “Health Literacy and Patient Safety: Help Patients Understand.” The last 5 minutes of the 23-minute video includes an example of a clinician using teach-back.
- **Keep in mind:**
 - ◇ **This is not a test of the patient's knowledge:** This is a test of how well you explained the concept.
 - ◇ **Use with everyone:** Use teach-back when you think the person understands and when you think someone is struggling with your directions.
 - ◇ **Teach to all staff:** All members of the practice staff can use it to make sure their communication is clear.

Tips ★

Suggested Approaches When Using Teach-back.

- “I want to be sure that I explained your medication correctly. Can you tell me how you are going to take this medicine?”
- “We covered a lot today about your diabetes, and I want to make sure that I explained things clearly. So let’s review what we discussed. What are three strategies that will help you control your diabetes?”
- “What are you going to do when you get home?”

2. Try the teach-back method.

- **Start Slowly.** Initially, you may want to try it with the last patient of the day.
- **Plan your approach.** Think about how you will ask your patient to teach-back information based on the topic you are reviewing. Keep in mind that some situations will not be appropriate for using the teach-back method.
- **Use handouts.** Reviewing written materials to reinforce the teaching points can be very helpful for patient understanding. Refer to [Tool 12: Use Health Education Materials Effectively.](#) 

- **Clarify.** If patients cannot remember or accurately repeat what you asked them, clarify your information or directions and allow them to teach it back again. Do this until the patient is able to correctly describe **in their own words** what they are going to do, without parroting back what you said.
- **Practice.** It may take some getting used to, but studies show that once established as part of a routine, it does not take longer to perform.

Track Your Progress

- **Assess results of the teach-back method with staff and patients.**
 - ◇ The [Teach-Back Self-Evaluation and Tracking Log](#)  provides a method for staff to document their experience using the teach-back method. Encourage staff to use the logs, and hold a discussion about their experience. This will allow people to share teach-back strategies that worked best. In addition, it is helpful to ask patients if they find the teach-back interaction positive and helpful during the patient encounter.
- **Assess how often the teach-back is used.**
 - ◇ A few weeks after first trying the teach-back, track how many clinicians or staff members are using it. Have each individual keep a log of when and how it was used over the course of a few days.

References

1. Kessels RP. Patients' memory for medical information. *J R Soc Med.* May 2003;96(5):219-22.
2. Anderson JL, Dodman S, Kopelman M, Fleming A. Patient information recall in a rheumatology clinic. *Rheumatology.* 1979;18(1):18-22.
3. Schillinger D, Piette J, Grumbach K, et al. Closing the loop: physician communication with diabetic patients who have low health literacy. *Arch Intern Med.* 2003;163(1):83-90.