

Huddle Up

Teach-Back

Research shows that patients remember and understand less than half of what healthcare providers explain to them. This lack of understanding can cause numerous problems and impact safety. Asking patients to recall and restate what they have been told is a top patient safety practice.

Teach-back is an effective method to check for understanding. It creates an opportunity for dialogue in which the provider gives information, then asks the patient to respond and confirm understanding before adding any new information. This also allows the provider to determine if reteaching is necessary.

Teach-Back Basics

- Use plain language and explain any new words or acronyms when teaching.
- Break down information into short statements.
- For more than one concept, teach the 2-3 main points for the first concept and check for understanding before going to the next concept.
- Be careful NOT to ask questions that can be answered with a Yes or No response, such as: “Do you understand?” or “Do you have any questions?”
- Ask for Teach-Back in a non-shaming tone. It’s not a test of the patient, but a check on how well you explained the ideas and what the patient understood.

Teach-Back in Action

1 Ask the patient to demonstrate understanding, using their own words.

“We covered a lot of information about your blood pressure today. I want to be sure I explained everything clearly. Can you please explain it back to me, or tell me in your own words what we talked about?”

2 Listen to the patient’s answer. If the patient does not repeat the information accurately, rephrase the information.

“It sounds like you understand why it’s important to control your blood pressure. Before we move on, I’d like to talk more about your blood pressure medications.”

3 Ask the patient to teach back the information again, using their own words, until you are comfortable they really understand it.

“What will you tell your spouse about the changes we made to your blood pressure medicines today?”

4 If they still do not understand, consider other strategies.