



What Is Teach-Back?

Teach-back is a way for you to confirm that patients understand what you've told them. It is also a way to be sure you're explaining things clearly. Use this guide to keep the basic concepts of teach-back fresh in your mind and to practice.



To use teach-back well:

1. Organize what you want to say.
2. Explain the first part of what you want to convey.
3. Ask the patient to explain it back to you.
4. Explain again in a different way, if the patient didn't fully understand the information.
5. Ask the patient to explain it back to you once more.
6. Explain the next part of what you want to say.
7. Ask the patient to explain back the latest part.
8. Repeat steps 6 and 7 until you get through all of the information.



Ways to ask patients if they understand

- I know we discussed a lot just now. It would help me know that I'm being clear if you tell me what I just said.
- In your own words, would you please tell me what I just said?
- Can you tell me what you heard me say just now?
- Will you tell me how you would explain that to a friend, partner, or family member?

Practice Teach-Back

Use this page to practice teach-back. If you have a study partner, take turns role-playing as provider and patient.

Example 1

Provider: We're going to paint fluoride varnish on your child's teeth. Fluoride makes your child's teeth harder and stronger to help protect them from getting cavities. Can you tell me in your own words what fluoride does?

Patient: It hardens the teeth.

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Provider: In a way, yes, but it does this by creating a hard surface around the teeth. Now, let's say you were talking to a friend. How would you describe what fluoride does?

Patient: I'd say it makes a hard surface on the teeth so they don't get cavities.

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Provider: That's right. So we paint the fluoride on the teeth, and it hardens on its own. Your child might feel a little stickiness on their teeth today. Just wait until tomorrow to brush your child's teeth. Would you explain that back to me?

Patient: So we just wait to brush tomorrow? My child can eat and drink normally today?

Your response: _____

Example 2

Provider: An old filling on one of your back teeth is cracked, and I can see some decay around its edges. I think we should replace it with a new filling. The new filling can be tooth-colored instead of silver. I would like you to make an appointment for a filling replacement with the receptionist. To make sure I said that clearly, will you repeat that back to me in your own words?

Patient: I think you said I have a cavity and I need it fixed. Did I do something wrong?

Your response: _____
