

## Using Teach-back with Medicines

Medication errors contribute to harm, confusion, and poor patient and caregiver experiences. Clinicians who prescribe, counsel, or support patients in understanding and using their medicines should use teach-back and show-back to clarify what people understand and how they take their medicines.

One way physicians, pharmacists, advanced practitioners, nurses, and other health team members check understanding is through Brown Bag Medicine Reviews. In these reviews, a person brings a bag with all their medicines, supplements, and over-the-counter products to the visit. They are asked to go through each one, tell what it is for, and say or show how and when they take or use it. This allows the clinician to identify missing or misunderstood information, and, if needed, clarify and check again to be sure the person understands. Brown Bag Reviews can also reveal other safety issues, like drug interactions or duplications. And doing these Reviews in a shame-free manner may reveal additional reasons—like high cost—for not taking medicines as prescribed. The [AHRQ Health Literacy Universal Precautions Toolkit's Tool 8](#) provides helpful details about how to conduct Brown Bag Medicine Reviews and to use them to improve care and reduce harm.

**Listen to a health literacy researcher talk about the importance of teach-back during Brown Bag Medicine Reviews**

[Brown Bag Medication Reviews and Teach-back for Medication Safety](#)



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### Need-to-know Information about Medicines, Supplements, and Over-the-counter Treatments

Think ahead about the most important information people need to know about their medicines and to be able to teach or show back. This may include:

- Current and new medicines, with generic and brand names.
- What medicines have been changed or stopped.
- Dose, timing, and how to take or use their medicines.
- Reminder processes, devices, or tools.
- Side effects to report and how to do so.

Remember to include supplements and over-the-counter and non-oral treatments.

For multiple medicines, use Chunk and Check to help people remember each one. Chunk and Check means separating multiple concepts into separate topics; identifying the two to three most important points; and clearly explaining those and confirming understanding with teach-back before moving on to the next one.

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## Examples of Medicine-related Teach-back Requests with Taking Responsibility Lines and Open-ended Questions

Role	Taking Responsibility Lines	Asking for Teach-back	Open-ended Questions
Diabetes Educator	<p>Medicines can be confusing, so I want to be sure I did a good job explaining this so you feel confident and are safe at home.</p> <p>Since we made a change to your insulin dosing today, let's make sure I explained it well.</p>	<p>Can you go over how you will use your insulin?</p> <p>Remind me what foods we discussed that could affect how you use this medicine?</p>	<p>What is your plan in case you miss a dose?</p> <p>What worries do you have about paying for your insulin? (If you have access to alternative payment resources, explain how they can find out more and check to be sure they have a way to remember the information.)</p>
Nurse Practitioner-Addiction Specialist	<p>We're going to go over a lot of information about naloxone.</p> <p><u>Chunk and Check</u></p> <p>To make sure I do a good job explaining it all, as we cover each part of this, I will ask you to go over the main things to remember in your own words</p>	<p><u>Chunk and Check</u></p> <p>Q1: Where will you store your naloxone kit?</p> <p>Q2: How do you know if somebody is overdosing?</p> <p>Q3: What should you do before you give the naloxone?</p> <p>Q4: How do you give the naloxone?</p> <p>Q5: What should you do after you give the naloxone?</p>	<p>Remind me where you will store this medicine. (As appropriate, reference rationales like refrigeration, child safety, opioid control.)</p> <p><u>Chunk and Check</u></p> <p>Is there anything about this medicine that you feel will be really hard to do or to follow on the schedule we set up?</p>

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## Examples of Medicine-related Teach-back Requests with Taking Responsibility Lines and Open-ended Questions (continued)

Role	Taking Responsibility Lines	Asking for Teach-back	Open-ended Questions
Pharmacist	<p>This is a new medicine for you.</p> <p>I want to be sure I did a good job explaining how to take it safely.</p>	Can you please tell me in your own words what it is for, and when and how you will take it?	<p>What changes to your everyday routines might this new medicine require?</p> <p>What tools do you have to help remember these changes while you get used to the new routine?</p>
Physician: Cardiologist	<p>We added a new heart medicine today and I want to be sure I explained the twice-a-day directions for taking it.</p> <p><u>Chunk and Check</u></p> <p>Then I want to be sure I was clear about how often you should take your blood pressure medicine.</p>	<p>Please tell me in your own words when you will take your twice-a-day heart medicine.</p> <p><u>Chunk and Check</u></p> <p>Now would you go over when you will take your blood pressure medicine?</p>	<p>Walk me through your typical day at home and tell me when you will take your heart medicines.</p> <p><u>Chunk and Check</u></p> <p>What, if any, worries or barriers do you have to taking your medicines?</p>
Physician: Family Medicine Physician	<p>Having 2 medicines with similar names can be confusing to lots of people.</p> <p>To be sure I explained it clearly, can you tell me how and when you will take “x” and “y”?</p>	<p>Can you tell me how and when you will take “x” and “y”?</p> <p>Remind me about the side effects we discussed that you will need to watch for and call me?</p>	If appropriate: Remind me which medicine we said you should stop taking?

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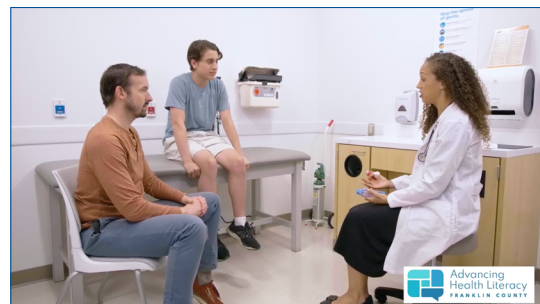
## Examples of Medicine-related Teach-back Requests with Taking Responsibility Lines and Open-ended Questions (continued)

Role	Taking Responsibility Lines	Asking for Teach-back	Open-ended Questions
Physician: Gastro- enterologist	We just went over how this new medicine will help your inflammatory bowel disease, but that it does have some important side effects you need to let us know about right away. I want to be sure I was clear so you know exactly what to watch for and what to do if one of these occur.	So could you please tell me what this medicine is for and how and when to take it?  And now could you go over in your own words what side effects you will watch for and call us about right away?	Which medicine is important to take with the exact timing it says on the label?
Respiratory Therapist	I find that lots of people get confused about their inhalers.	Today we added another medicine to help your son's asthma. To be sure your childcare provider keeps them straight, can you tell me how you will explain it to her so she can help your son?	Who will you call if you have questions or worries about these medicines?
Social Worker	Many people have problems paying for their prescriptions. This program can help with that.  But since it has very specific eligibility requirements and deadlines, I want to be sure I explained all that clearly.	Could you go through the application form and tell me how you will fill out the sections I've highlighted in yellow?  You will be able to keep that as a guide when you leave today.	What might get in the way of you sending in the application before the deadline?

# Using Teach-back with Medicines

## Videos Demonstrating Use of Teach-back for Medicine-related Topics

Watch a pediatrician use teach-back to assess and confirm a teen's understanding of how to use their inhaler.



Observe an internal medicine physician use teach-back to assess and confirm a Spanish-speaking adult's understanding of how to use their inhaler, in partnership with an interpreter.



Watch a pharmacist use teach-back with a family member picking up a prescription for her grandfather.



Listen to a nurse care coordinator describe how teach-back is included to ensure understanding of clear actionable guidance for a complex medication schedule with a family whose preferred language is not English.

