

# Tips for Teaching Patients

*“Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day, teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime” ~ Confucius*

## Benefits of Teaching

1. Reduced hospitalizations and readmissions.
2. Symptoms improve, anxiety decreases, and quality of life increases.
3. Research shows, almost without exception, that patient/family teaching is an effective means of helping patients/families manage health care needs. Compliance is improved with effective teaching.

## Barriers to Learning

1. **Education:** low literacy and/or education level. 20% of Americans cannot read at a 4<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> grade level. The *average* reading level of American adults is 7<sup>th</sup> or 8<sup>th</sup> grade.
2. **Language/Culture/Religion:** not proficient in English, dietary/health care restrictions or customs, only one person makes decisions for the family, etc.
3. **Age and development:** very young or developmentally delayed patients; elderly patients with physical and cognitive changes.
4. **Emotional:** anxiety, fear, feeling overwhelmed, embarrassed, ashamed, angry, depressed, feelings of failure or feelings of being punished.
5. **Attitude/Motivation/Personality:** Non-compliant, negative attitude, pre-conceived beliefs, poor self-confidence or not motivated to learn.
6. **Distractions/Focus:** alarms, visitors, worries, staff in and out, etc.
7. **Physical Problems and Limitations:** pain and other physical symptoms, sensory deficits.
8. **Family dynamics:** minimal or no support, poor relationship with family members.

## The Teaching Process

The process of teaching is very similar to the nursing process:

1. **Assess** learning needs and learning barriers.
2. **Identify** the patient's needs and gaps based on your assessment.
3. **Plan** and develop realistic learning objectives: *what* will be taught, *when* teaching will occur, *where* teaching will occur, *who* will teach and *who* will learn, *how* teaching will occur.
4. **Implement** teaching using a variety of methods.
5. **Evaluate** and document patient/family learning. Modify plan if needed.

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## 10 Facts about Teaching and Learning

1. Educating patients is a *process* not a onetime event. You are assessing, evaluating and teaching throughout the patient's healthcare journey.
2. Teaching isn't one size fits all. It must be individualized to the patient's needs. It's a disservice to the patient to use a cookie cutter approach.
3. Teaching doesn't automatically equal learning. You have to evaluate outcomes to really know if teaching was effective.
4. Motivation is the key to learning. Many factors will influence the patient's success but motivation is what moves a person in the direction of their goal(s). If they are not motivated to learn, then your teaching cannot be fully successful
5. The patient is part of the team and should be an active member when making decisions.
6. Teaching doesn't have to be formal. It can take place while you are performing a task or talking with the patient. Just explaining what you are doing is one type of teaching.
7. Our job is not to carry the patient to the finish line but rather to give them the necessary tools for them to get there on their own two feet.
8. The methods you use to teach are just as important as what you teach.
9. Health literacy isn't the same as reading literacy. Someone could be very literate in the reading but not about their own health, especially when they are dealing with a chronic or terminal illness.
10. Teaching is a **team** effort and every healthcare professional has a responsibility to participate.

## TEACHING Tips:

**T**ake time to establish a *therapeutic* relationship with the patient/family

**E**ducate the patient and family as *early* as possible

**A**ssess the patient and family's readiness to learn and learning barriers

**C**ommunicate effectively and *consistently*

**H**elp the patient and family learn to be independent

**I**nvolve the pt, family and caregivers in *interactive* learning

**N**ever rush or force learning

**G**ive a variety of teaching materials/use multiple teaching methods

# Tips for Teaching Patients

## ***Take time to establish a therapeutic relationship with the patient and family:***

- Build a trusting relationship with the patient and family *first*.
- A good teacher-learner rapport is important for teaching to be more effective.
- Be honest, supportive and compassionate.
- Promote confidence and competence.

## ***Educate patients and families as early as possible:***

- Discharge teaching should begin on admission and before if possible.
- Look for opportunities to teach whenever you interact with patients.
- Teach the basics first, “*need to know info*”. (Like teaching good hand hygiene first before teaching how to change a dressing).
- Teach in response to questions and concerns.

## ***Assess the patient and family’s readiness to learn & potential learning barriers:***

- Assessment is one of your best tools for effective teaching.
- Assess and address specific concerns that the patient, family or staff has re: the patient’s care.
- Assess what the patient/family already knows and what they want to learn.
- Take cues from them to help you implement the right plan.
- Respect choices and boundaries. Don’t be judgmental.
- Never assume something based on the patient’s background, education level, profession, etc. Always assess before you plan or implement teaching.

## ***Communicate effectively and consistently:***

- Good communication is essential to learning.
- Decrease distractions by turning off the TV and limiting visitors during teaching times.
- Maintain privacy and confidentiality.
- Communicate in the patient’s preferred language and be culturally sensitive.
- Use non-threatening language. Avoid medical jargon.
- The purpose of what you are teaching must be clear, direct and useful. Help the patient/family understand the relevance of what you need to teach.
- Keep teaching sessions short and simple.
- Be an active listener, encourage questions and be available to answer questions.
- Ask open-ended questions that require more than a “yes” or “no” answer.
- Use age/developmental level-specific words and techniques when teaching patients.
- Be consistent; don’t contradict what you teach or what other healthcare providers have taught. Clarify if there is a contradiction.
- Repeat, review and reinforce what is being taught.
- Evaluate, empower and elevate. Evaluate their understanding of what you communicated, empower them to ask questions and praise them for what they did correctly.
- Give real time feedback. Correct mistakes in a tactful and sensitive way

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## *Help the patient and family to be independent:*

- Help the patient and family learn self-care and become problem-solvers.
- Empower them to continue learning beyond what you taught them.

## *Involve the patient, family and caregivers in interactive learning:*

- The teaching/learning process should be interactive, never passive or one sided.
- Be a partner with the patient to make **mutual** goals.
- Identify all caretakers (family or not) and include them in teaching.
- Evaluate and document the patient/family's response to what was taught.

## *Never rush or force learning:*

- Teach according to the patient/family's pace and tolerance level, not yours.
- Create a climate of comfort: a relaxed, non-hurried environment.
- Be patient and calm when you teach.
- Don't try to teach everything at one time.
- Break down skills into small manageable tasks.
- Repeat teaching when necessary.

## *Give a variety of educational materials and use multiple teaching methods:*

- *Individualize* objectives and teaching methods.
- Use a variety of teaching methods: audio, visual, hands-on, written.
- Use the appropriate literacy level and language for the patient and family. Use universal symbols when possible.
- Emphasize and summarize the things they need to know; use a highlighter for printed materials.
- Check out online educational materials for accuracy before giving them to the pt/family.
- It's helpful when the learner can relate what is being taught to their own frame of reference. Give examples when possible.
- For hands on skills, use printed materials with pictures and diagrams and models or practice equipment like syringes. Make sure to point out the appropriate measuring tools for teaspoon, ounces, etc.
- Utilize multi-disciplinary team members when possible.
- Provide resources: community organizations, support groups, names and who to call to answer questions, etc.
- Evaluate the results of teaching by having patients teach back to you what you have taught them. This is a more effective tool to evaluate the outcome of your teaching than the patient just verbalizing understanding.

# Tips for Teaching Patients

## Definition of Terms

- **Education** is the process of receiving or giving systematic instruction
- **Health Literacy:** “The degree to which individuals have the capacity to obtain, process and understand basic health information and services needed to make appropriate health decisions.” — Source: Healthy People 2010
- **Learning** - gain or acquire knowledge of or skill in (something) by study, experience, or being taught.
- **Teaching** -show or explain to (someone) how to do something.

## Resources

[5 tips to help nurses improve patient education skills](#)

[A Guide to Patient Teaching and Education in Nursing](#)

[Five Tips for Providing Effective Patient Education](#)

[Patient teaching in five easy steps](#)

[Tips to Improve Patient Education](#)

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