

How to clearly communicate with people about chronic kidney disease (CKD)

Why clear communication matters

1 in 5 U.S. adults struggle to manage their health. This includes managing a chronic condition, like kidney disease. People with low literacy and health literacy skills are also more likely to:

- Be more at risk for CKD
- Have poorer health outcomes, such as their kidney disease progressing to kidney failure

Clear communication strategies are important because they can help everyone, regardless of their literacy level. They can help people:

- Better understand information about their health
- Make better health-related decisions or behaviors
- Be more involved in their health

Health literacy is the degree in which people can find, understand and use information and services to make health-related decisions and actions.

About 9 in 10 U.S. adults struggle with health literacy.

Clear communication strategies you can use

As a Kidney Health Coach (KHC), you can use these skills to make sure that people understand the information you share:



Plain language



The OARS method



Teach-back method

Thanks for being a KHC!

We share a responsibility to create conditions in which everyone can be healthy together.



Use plain language

Plain language is communication people can understand the **first time** they read or hear it.

1

Avoid medical jargon, abbreviations and acronyms. Use simple, common words when possible. For example:

Instead of...	→	Say
"chronic"	→	"long-term"
"take your medication orally"	→	"take your medicine by mouth"

2

Use 1 to 3 points when explaining a topic. This will help keep you and your audience more focused.

3

Focus on specific action items. Explain what they need to do, how to do it, and why.

4

Use real-life examples, storytelling, analogies and metaphors to help make the information more relatable and easier to understand.

5

Speak at a pace that is easy to follow and repeat key points if you have enough time. If you are not sure if you are speaking too fast or slow, it is okay to ask the person you are talking to.

Use clear communication with everyone because you cannot tell how much someone understands about their health by looking at them.

Recognize cultural differences when you communicate. Some cultures and religions have different social norms than your own. **Be aware of your:**

- Eye contact
- Body language
- Tone of voice
- How close or far you are



Use the OARS method

The OARS method is a set of communication skills that can help you better engage with people.

OARS stands for:

Open-ended questions

Ask questions that cannot be answered with a simple “yes” or “no.” This invites the other person into an open conversation, instead of just listening to you give information. **For example:**

“What concerns do you have about your kidneys?”

Affirmations

Convey empathy, respect, and support by acknowledging the person’s strengths and efforts. **For example:**

“You have thought a lot about this treatment decision.”

Reflective listening

Actively listen to a person and then make a statement about the meaning of what they have said. **For example:**

“I see tears in your eyes. That tells me this is really important to you.”

Summarizing

Clarify meaning at any point during a conversation. **For example:**

“It sounds like you are worried about your recent test results and want to meet with your doctor. Did I get that right?”



Use the teach-back method

The teach-back method is a way to make sure you have explained something clearly so the other person understands.

Teach-back works well when you are teaching new information that might involve several steps, like when and how to take medicines such as potassium binders.

Here are the steps of the teach-back method:

- 1 Explain** a new concept
- 2 Ask** the person to explain it back to you
- 3 Check** their understanding:
 - ➡ If they explain it **correctly**, move to the next concept
 - ↩ If they **do not explain it correctly**, use different words or visuals to explain again

Here is an example of how a Kidney Health Coach can use the teach-back method when talking with someone about preventing kidney disease:



"One way to keep your kidneys healthy and prevent CKD is by eating healthy foods. Try to eat plenty of fruits and vegetables, foods low in fat, and avoid salt and sugar."

"Okay, I think I get it."



I want to make sure I clearly explained that. Please tell me how you can eat healthy."

"Um ... I can eat lots of fruits, vegetables and fat. I should not eat salt and sugar."



"Good job! There is just one point I was not very clear on: foods with fat. Let me write the foods you should eat more of and the foods you should eat less of. Let us review it together to see if you have any questions."

➡ Learn more

To learn more about how to clearly communicate with people about CKD:



Visit the NIH Clear Communication resource page



Visit the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ) Teach-Back Method toolkit