



As a Kidney Health Coach (KHC) and a health care professional, you can use this guide to learn:

- How to better understand patients' backgrounds
- How to tailor your teaching methods
- What to discuss with your patients

How can I better understand patients' backgrounds?

When you are coaching a patient as a KHC, you will be most effective if you have a partnership built on empathy and trust. Learning more about the patient and their cultural background can help you know how to better communicate with them. It can also help you know which factors to address that may be affecting their health.



A patient's religion, culture, beliefs and customs can affect how they:

- Understand health concepts
- Take care of their own health
- Make health care decisions

Social determinants of health (SDOH) are nonmedical factors that can affect a patient's health and well-being. There are five main groups of SDOH:

- **Economic stability** – This includes a patient's income, socioeconomic status and cost of living. Factors like poverty, unemployment, housing instability or food insecurity can negatively affect a patient's health.
- **Education access and quality** – This includes a patient's literacy, if they graduated from high school and if they received higher education.
- **Health care access and quality** – This includes a patient's ability to pay for health care, physical access to health care, health literacy and how well they understand their health.
- **Neighborhood and built environment** – This includes the quality of a patient's housing and their access to transportation, physical activity opportunities, healthy foods, clean water and clean air.
- **Social community context** – This includes a patient's relationships and interactions with family, friends, co-workers and community members. Social and community support can help improve a patient's health.



During your coaching, you may be able to offer resources that can help address some SDOH.

For example:

- If you recommend a kidney-friendly eating plan, ask if they have access to fresh fruits and vegetables. If they do not, you can give them information about [food assistance programs](#).
- If you refer them to a specialist, ask if they will have transportation to their appointment. If they do not, you can give them information about local transportation services.



You can find more resources on AKF's [community resource finder](#) page.

What questions can I ask to learn about a patient?

Here are some questions to learn more about a patient's cultural background:

Is there anything I should know about your culture, beliefs or religious practices that would help me take better care of you?

Do you have any dietary restrictions that we should consider as we develop a kidney-friendly eating plan?

What do you call your illness and what do you think caused it?

Here are some questions to learn more about a patient's SDOH:

What is your housing situation?

Are you able to afford meals on a weekly basis?

Has a lack of transportation kept you from medical appointments, work or running errands?

Do you have a job with health care benefits?

Do you ever have trouble understanding medical information? If so, do you get help from a relative or a friend?

How can I learn more?



To learn more about how religion, culture and beliefs can affect a patient's health, you can visit:

- AHRQ's [Culture, Customs, and Beliefs toolkit](#)
- The [National Center for Cultural Competence](#) website
- The [EthnoMed](#) website



To learn more about social determinants of health, you can visit:

- Healthy People 2030's [Social Determinants of Health](#) page
- Rural Health Information Hub's [Tools to Assess Social Determinants of Health](#) page

How can I tailor my teaching methods?

Use clear communication strategies

Use clear communication strategies to make sure patients understand the information you share.

Here are some evidence-based communication strategies. For more detailed descriptions of each strategy, read our [“How to clearly communicate with people about CKD”](#) guide.



Plain language

Communication patients can understand the first time they read or hear it. Use simple common words, avoid medical jargon and repeat key points.



The OARS method

A set of communication skills that includes open-ended questions, affirmations, reflective listening and summarizing to support patients emotionally.



Active listening

Give full attention to your patient. Let patients know you are listening to them and they are being heard. This includes being patient without interrupting, appropriate eye contact, keeping an open mind and withholding judgment.



Teach-back method

A way to make sure you have explained something clearly enough that the patient understands it. This involves asking the patient to explain back to you in their own words and not just repeat what you said.

Use patients' preferred learning style

People learn in a variety of ways and may prefer one way over another.

Not everyone fits into one learning style, and some may prefer to learn in more than one way. Before you start teaching, ask the patient how they like to learn.

Here are some common learning styles and ways to tailor your teaching methods for each:



Visual

Visual learners like to see and observe information they are learning about. They may prefer if you use:

- Pictures, charts, infographics and diagrams
- Brochures or other printed materials
- Presentations
- Videos with lots of graphics



Listening

Listening (or auditory) learners often learn better when information is presented as sound. They may prefer if you use:

- Recorded discussions or lessons
- Videos
- Podcasts



Reading and writing

While there is some overlap with visual learners, reading and writing learners learn through written words. They may learn best by writing notes or reading information in text. They may prefer if you use:

- Worksheets they can take notes on
- Presentations
- Brochures or other printed materials



Kinesthetic

Kinesthetic (or tactile) learners learn through experience and doing. They may prefer:

- Hands-on demonstrations
- Interacting with models or props



You can find infographics, brochures and factsheets in the [AKF resource library](#).



The AKF kidney disease education [YouTube playlist](#) has videos with lots of graphics.

Recognize your implicit bias

While coaching others, it's important to recognize your implicit bias as it may affect your relationship with your patients.

Recognizing and addressing implicit bias encourages better communication and builds trust between you and your patients.

Implicit bias is our attitudes or stereotypes that affect our understanding, actions and decisions in an unconscious way. An implicit bias can make us unintentionally act in ways that are not consistent with our values.

Implicit bias is often seen in race, but also applies to gender identity, sexuality, age, weight, disabilities, religion and more.

When we meet people from other cultures, we tend to draw conclusions or make assumptions about their possible behavior or values based on the “visible” part of their culture.

These assumptions can impact our objectivity when working with culturally diverse groups. This can lead to stigma, stereotyping and discrimination.



To help you recognize your implicit biases, you can take implicit association tests about race, religion, gender and other topics at [Project Implicit](https://www.projectimplicit.org/).

What should I discuss with patients during our sessions?

Share information about CKD

Share your knowledge about CKD. You can find kidney health education presentations on the [KHC portal](#) in English and Spanish. You can also give patients educational materials, brochures and fact sheets in English and Spanish from the [AKF resource library](#). Shared materials should be in the patient's primary language.

Encourage patients to make better choices to improve their health

Help patients make better health and lifestyle choices to improve their kidney and overall health. During your sessions, work with patients to make realistic goals they can achieve. Ask them to keep track of their progress. This can help them stay focused on their goals and see how well they are managing their health.

For example, if someone needs to make more kidney-friendly eating choices, you can:

- Share kidney-friendly recipes and nutrition information from AKF's [Kidney Kitchen®](#).
- Help them create a weekly meal plan or grocery shopping list using [Kidney Kitchen Pro™](#).
- Ask them to keep a food diary so they can keep track of their changes.

Use Kidney Kitchen Pro™

[Kidney Kitchen Pro](#) is a resource for dietitians to create custom meal plans and toolkits for patients.



If they need help making these changes, you can connect them to mental health or community resources. You can find these resources and more on AKF's [community resource finder](#). For example, if someone needs help making a kidney-friendly food and fluid plan, you can connect them to a dietitian, a support group or a food assistance program.

For another example, a patient may say they struggle to remember to take their medicines or have concerns about their side effects. You can:

- Show them tools they can use to remember to take their medicines. This can include pill reminder apps, phone alarms and calendars.
- Share materials about medicines from the [AKF resource library](#) so they can learn more about side effects.



Answer questions and concerns

- During your sessions, make sure to answer any questions and resolve patients' concerns about a specific complaint or misconception.
- Keep an open dialogue and use open-ended questions (questions that can't be answered with "Yes" or "No") to allow patients to voice their questions or concerns.
- Patients may hint at their concerns without directly asking questions. If you use active listening and the OARS method, you may be able to notice concerns without the patient directly asking about them.
- You may have limited time with your patients and may not be able to address all of their questions and concerns. You can recommend that they make a follow-up appointment to continue your coaching. You can also refer them to a specialist, such as a dietitian, who can spend more time answering their questions.

Encourage patients to share their knowledge

You can also encourage patients to share their knowledge about CKD with others by becoming a [Kidney Health Coach](#).

Give a summary and ask for next steps

At the end of your coaching session, give a summary of what you have discussed. Ask them to tell you:

- 2-3 important things they remember from this session
- 2-3 action steps they will do to help improve their kidney and overall health



If needed, use the teach-back method to gently correct and clarify any information they may have misunderstood. Here is an example of how you can use teach-back to correct and clarify information:



Let's talk about how you'll take your new medicine. For it to work as well as possible to help with your kidney disease, it is important that you take it just as prescribed:

- Take 1 pill in the morning and 1 pill in the evening, at least 6 hours apart
- Take the pills at least 1 hour before you eat a meal

Okay, I think I get it.



I want to make sure I clearly explained that. Please tell me how you will take your medicine.

Um... I'll take 1 pill every 6 hours?



Ah, I see that I was not very clear! Let me explain differently:

- Take 1 pill at least an hour before you eat breakfast in the morning
 - Take another pill at least an hour before you eat dinner in the evening
 - And, make sure at least 6 hours go by in between the 2 pills. For example, if you take your morning pill at 7 a.m., take the 2nd one no earlier than 1 p.m.
- Can you tell me again how you will take your medicine?

OK: I'll take 1 pill an hour before breakfast, and another pill an hour before dinner. And I have to leave 6 hours between the 2 pills.



Great! You can ask me or your pharmacist if you have any questions about your medicine in the future!

Follow up with patients

You can follow up with patients after your coaching sessions. Some patients may want another session to discuss the improvements they have made in their lifestyles. This gives you and your patient a chance to see the positive impact a KHC has made in their life.