

Recommendations for Communicating With Older Adults

From *Communicating With Older Adults: An Evidence-Based Review of What Really Works*, Gerontological Society of America, 2012

General Tips for Improving Interactions With Older Adults

- 1 Recognize the tendency to stereotype older adults, then conduct your own assessment.
- 2 Avoid speech that might be seen as patronizing to an older person (“elderspeak”).

General Tips for Improving Face-to-Face Communication With Older Adults

- 3 Monitor and control your nonverbal behavior.
- 4 Minimize background noise.
- 5 Face older adults when you speak with them, with your lips at the same level as theirs.
- 6 Pay close attention to sentence structure when conveying critical information.
- 7 Use visual aids such as pictures and diagrams to help clarify and reinforce comprehension of key points.
- 8 Ask open-ended questions and genuinely listen.

Tips for Optimizing Interactions Between Health Care Professionals and Older Patients

- 9 Express understanding and compassion to help older patients manage fear and uncertainty related to the aging process and chronic diseases.
- 10 Ask questions about an older adult’s living situation and social contacts.
- 11 Include older adults in the conversation even if their companion is in the room.
- 12 Customize care by seeking information about older adults’ cultural beliefs and values pertaining to illness and death.

- 13** Engage in shared decision making.
- 14** Strike an appropriate balance between respecting patients' autonomy and stimulating their active participation in health care.
- 15** Avoid ageist assumptions when providing information and recommendations about preventive care.
- 16** Providing information to patients is important, but how you give information to patients may be even more important.
- 17** Use direct, concrete, actionable language when talking to older adults.
- 18** Verify listener comprehension during a conversation.
- 19** Set specific goals for listener comprehension.
- 20** Incorporate both technical knowledge and emotional appeal when discussing treatment regimens with older patients.
- 21** To provide quality health care, focus on enhancing patient satisfaction.
- 22** Use humor and a direct communication style with caution when interacting with non-Western older patients.
- 23** Help Internet-savvy older adults with chronic diseases find reputable sources of online support.
- 24** If computers are used during face-to-face visits with older adults, consider switching to models that facilitate collaborative use.

Tips for Communicating With Older Adults With Dementia

- 25** Maintain a positive communicative tone when speaking with an older adult with dementia.
- 26** Avoid speaking slowly to older adults with dementia.
- 27** Pose different types of questions to patients with dementia according to conversational goals.
- 28** When communicating with older adults with dementia, simplify sentences by using right-branching sentences.
- 29** Use verbatim repetition or paraphrase sentences to facilitate comprehension in older adults with dementia.