

## What is Check-back and how do I use it?

*Let Godfrey help us learn how.*



Hi, I'm Godfrey and, like you, I sometimes use health services. Together with other patients, carers and health workers, I helped design this website. We spoke to a wide range of people and found many of us leave a health appointment not being completely clear about what was said or what we need to do. Here is what people told us about how hard it can be to understand and remember everything.

They say do this and this and then, and you know, come back in six months time and I leave and I'm just like "What do I have to do?"



It's just one thing after another after another. My mind has gone blank and I can't absorb it all. I'm just reeling.



When I went to the doctors I really understood what he was telling me. But once I went home I forgot half of the words he was telling me.



Does this ever happen to you? Do you sometimes feel like you haven't quite understood, or that you can't remember exactly what you need to do?

There are many benefits of making sure you understand the information that health workers give you. Here are a few that people shared with us.



Understanding health information can also help keep you safe.



I thought I had it all sorted but then my daughter picked up I wasn't taking my tablets properly. I guess that is why I got dizzy and had the fall.



We know that when people don't really understand that they may need to come back again, the treatment may not work as well or they may even need to come into hospital.



One way to check everything is clear is to repeat back the information you've been told.

We call this process '**check-back**'. It lets both you and the health worker who is giving you the information be sure that things have been explained clearly.

Checking back is something we already know how to do because we do it every day.

Here 's an example of how we already do this in our everyday life.

## Emil, Su and Anna are catching up in their local café.



Perhaps you can relate to what these two consumers told us.



Take a look at this short animation, which is a great summary of how check-back can make a difference for everyone.



## So, what is check-back?

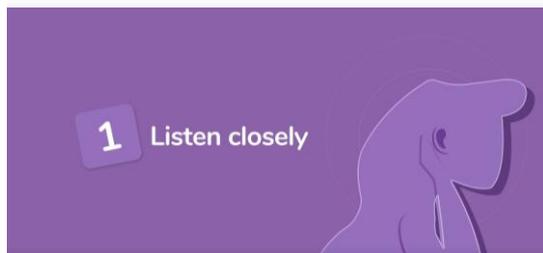
Check-back is an easy way to make sure you leave a health appointment confident that you understand and can recall what a health worker has told you.

There are



steps

There are 4 steps to check-back.



1. **Listen closely** to what the health worker is saying.

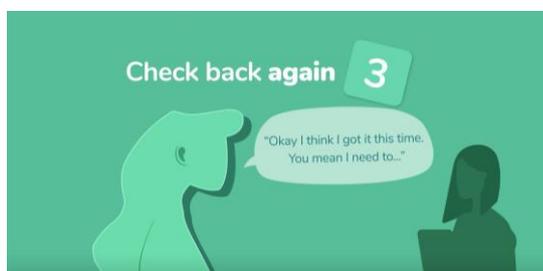


2. In your own words, **summarise what they said**. You could say something like, "I just want to check I've got everything. Did you say....."

Even if you *think* you've understood, **check-back**.



If there is a lot of information then try to check-back as you go.



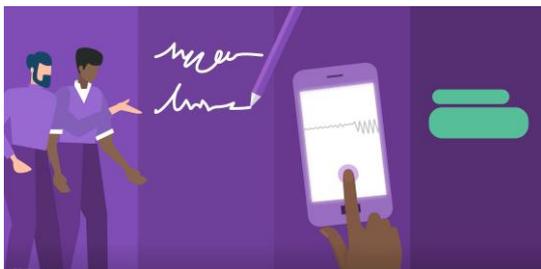
3. If you have missed something, the health worker may re-explain some points. **Listen again** and if you're *still not sure*, **check-back** again. You could say something like, "Okay, I think I got it this time. You mean I need to...."

# Check *back*

Will you check to get it right?

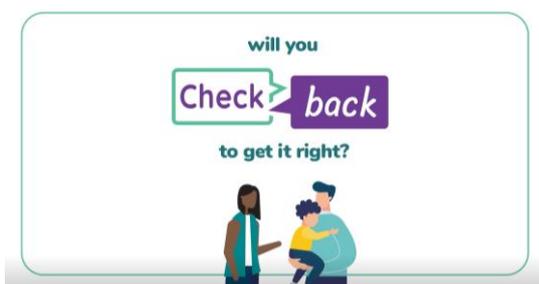


If they use medical words you don't understand, ask them to speak plainly.



4. If you need a bit **more help** you can:

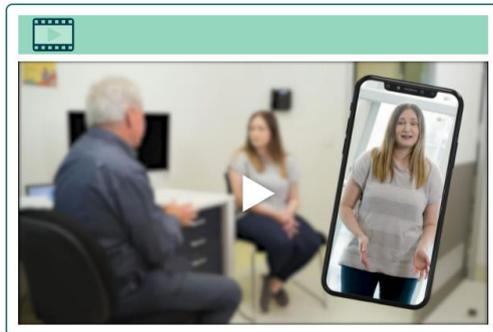
- Take someone with you to ask questions on your behalf.
- Write the information down, or ask the health worker to write it down for you.
- Ask if you can record the conversation on your phone.
- Ask who to contact if you have any follow-up questions when you get home.



So, the next time you visit a health worker, **will you check to get it right?**



You can use check-back with any health worker, even if you think they are busy. Here's an example of how Petra used check-back to make sure she understood what her GP told her.



Petra: Sometimes I feel like they have one hand on my shoulder and the other on the door knob. I know doctors are really busy and I don't want to take up their time especially when they have a waiting room full of patients. But, recently I used check-back and it made things really clear for me and the doctor didn't seem to mind that I asked.

.....

Petra: Ok, great. I just want to check-back to make sure I take the medication safely. So I take this new antibiotic 3 times a day until my cough goes away and the existing antibiotic that I am on once a day I continue taking that one as well.

Dr George: No, no. The once a day antibiotic you need to stop and the 3 times a day antibiotic I am going to give you today that is the one you start. They're not safe together. And you need to finish the box off of the antibiotic I give you today. Not till the cough goes. You need to finish the box off.

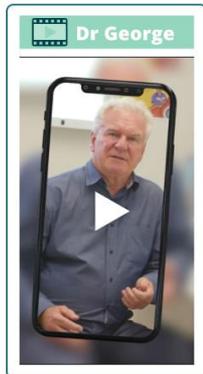
It's good that you checked. It is better that you take the time now to be sure.

Petra: Yes and it means when I get home I don't have to call you to double check.

Dr George: Yes, that's right and I hope you get better fairly quickly.

Petra: Thank you

Watch what they both had to say about using check-back.



Dr George: All too often I see patients going away not understanding so I really like it when people ask me questions before they leave.



Petra: I know some healthcare workers may not be comfortable with me asking questions but it is too important not to. After all it is my body, my health.



The health workers we spoke to were supportive of their patients using check-back. In fact, they told us there were benefits not just for their patients but also for themselves.

# Check *back*

Will you check to get it right?

It always makes me feel so upset when people come back to hospital because things were not made easier for them to remember or understand.



I value open and honest communication. To me it is a two-way partnership.



Do you check to get it right when you talk to a health worker?

Unsure **Sometimes** I try to **Yes**  
I want to **o** Most of the time



“People told us some of the reasons they don’t use check-back.”



Which of these might prevent you from checking back?

Tick the boxes below that best describe your barriers.

- The doctor/health worker is busy and other people are waiting
- I feel nervous or embarrassed
- I'm afraid of looking silly because I don't understand
- I don't feel confident talking to medical people
- When I feel anxious or upset, it's hard to concentrate and remember
- I don't feel I have the right to question what my doctor says

Click [here](#) to access a resource that gives some tips for using check-back with confidence.



Practising check-back at home and in everyday life will help you build the habit of doing it when you visit a health worker.

Here are some things you could say to your health worker to check you've understood correctly.

Choose **one or two** that you would be comfortable using:

After you've chosen your sentences, use the **NEXT** button below to add them to your personal check-back help sheet.

- I just want to go back over what you said...-
- 'I just want to check back that I...'
- 'Can I double check with you how I should take my medication?'
- 'If the pharmacist says "take 3ml three times a day", I'll say back "So I just take 3ml three times a day, is that right?"'
- 'I need to make sure I've got this right...'
- 'I'm not sure I understand. Would you please repeat what you just said?'
- 'Thank you for telling me that. I just want to check that I've understood correctly. Did you mean...'
- 'I need to be sure I understand what I have to do...'
- 'Hmm, I don't think I got it all. Can you tell me again, please?'
- 'That is very important information and I want to make sure I got it all. Did you say...'
- 'I'm not sure what you mean by...'



How will you use check-back next time you visit a health worker?

You can download your personal check-back help sheet to take with you to your appointments.

This will give you some prompts for check-back, remind you of what you want to ask, and provide space for the health worker to write key points down.

You can download a general version of this resource [here](#).



“Here are some other things you could do to help you understand and remember information.”



## Support Person



Take someone with you to your health appointment. Better yet, take someone who is comfortable asking questions. If they can't come in person, they could join in by phone or video-link.



## Interpreter



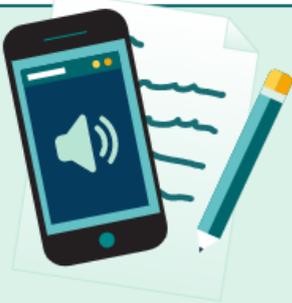
Ask for an interpreter. A professional health interpreter will translate the conversation between you and a health worker. They can be organised for any health appointment by the person who makes your appointment.



## List of questions to ask your doctor



Make a list of questions and take them to your doctor. If you are getting new information, such as a change in medication, *check back* about how and when to take it before you leave. Don't wait until your next appointment.



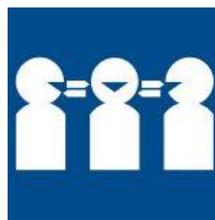
**Ask your health worker to record or write down the information**



Ask your health worker to write the information down for you. Or ask them if it is okay for you to record what they say on your phone. This can help you remember it later. You should always seek the health worker's permission before recording on your phone.

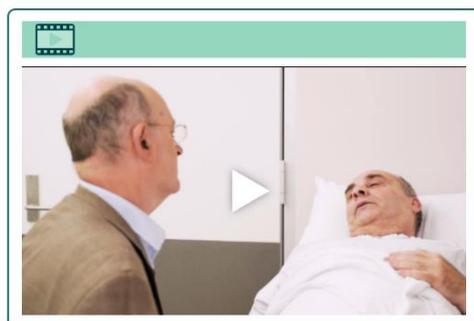
**More information**  
(opens in a separate window)

## Optional extras



Watch this video if you would like more information about using check-back with an interpreter.

*Transcript can be accessed from our [resources page](#).*



Watch this video below if you would like more information about the value of bringing a support person with you.

*Transcript can be accessed from our [resources page](#).*

So the next time you visit a health worker take your check-back help sheet with you and have a go!



## Your feedback...

**Thank you** for taking the time to do this module. We welcome your feedback.

Overall how would you rate this module, from 1 to 5 stars

What is one thing you have learnt?

Do you have any positive comments about the module and/or any suggestions for how we could improve it?