

Overcoming barriers to using check-back

Using check-back can help you get the most out of your health appointments, but not everyone will feel comfortable using it. Here are some of the reasons people might not use check-back, and a few tips to build your confidence to try it.

1. The doctor/health worker is busy and other people are waiting

Sometimes the waiting room is full and you know the health worker only has a short time to see you. This can make you feel rushed or reluctant to ask questions.

It is OK to take time to check back if you don't understand something. Health workers told us this will often save time in the long run.

HELPFUL TIPS

- ✓ Take a list of things you want to discuss and show it to the health worker at the start of the appointment. This will help you both decide what you want to discuss first.
- ✓ If you have lots of things to discuss, you can book a longer appointment.
- ✓ Ask where you can find more information about things that concern you. The health worker may refer you to someone else who can give you more detail (e.g. a dietitian).

2. I feel nervous or I'm not confident talking to medical people

Many people are nervous or lack confidence when talking with health workers. This is more often the case when talking with doctors. Although it can sometimes be scary to talk to them, remember that they are there to help.

HELPFUL TIPS

- ✓ Take a family member or friend with you. They can act as a comforting presence and are another pair of ears in case you miss information.
- ✓ Find a doctor or other health worker that you feel comfortable to talk to.
- ✓ If you can, let the health worker know you are nervous. You could say something like: "I always feel a bit shy talking with doctors".

3. I feel embarrassed

Some people feel embarrassed talking about themselves, especially if it is an awkward topic. But having an open conversation with your health worker can stop smaller issues turning into big ones.

HELPFUL TIPS

- ✓ No matter what you say, it probably won't be the first time they've heard it.
- ✓ **Be honest about your embarrassment.** Say: "I'm a bit uncomfortable to talk about this, but..." This lets your doctor know that you're uneasy.
- ✓ Write things down in advance, as this can reduce the emotional burden of talking about an awkward topic.

4. I'm afraid of looking silly because I don't understand

Health workers sometimes use complex medical terms without realising they are doing this. It is their responsibility to explain things to you clearly. Using check-back will help raise their awareness about the importance of using plain language.

HELPFUL TIPS

- ✓ Remember the appointment is all about you.
- ✓ Rather than saying you don't understand, just say something like: "I didn't quite catch everything – can you go through it again please?"
- ✓ Many health workers told us "there is no such thing as a silly question". They would prefer you ask than go away not understanding.

5. When I feel anxious or upset, it's hard to concentrate and remember

Sometimes emotions can make it hard to listen carefully in a health appointment. You may be hearing bad news, or worried about things, or just overwhelmed by the situation. This is very common, but it can make it hard to concentrate on what is being said.

HELPFUL TIPS

- ✓ Take a support person with you. They can provide emotional support but also take in information you may have missed. If they cannot come in person you could have them telephone into the conversation.
- ✓ Ask the doctor to write things down for you.
- ✓ Ask if you can record the conversation on your phone so you can listen to it later at home.

6. I don't feel I have the right to question what my doctor says

Consumers have healthcare rights – see: [Australian Charter of Healthcare Rights](#).

These include the right to ask questions and have open and honest communication. You also have the right to receive clear information about your condition.

Many people don't feel confident about asserting these rights, but you can do this in ways that are comfortable for you.

HELPFUL TIPS

- ✓ If confident to do so you can say something directly, such as: "I need you to be open with me because as a consumer I have the right to be given clear and honest information".
- ✓ You may feel more comfortable saying something like: "It's important for me to ask questions so I understand."
- ✓ If you don't feel comfortable asking questions of your doctor, look for another health professional you can talk with more easily.
- ✓ If your rights as a consumer are not being met, you can contact the [Health Care Complaints Commission](#) in your state.