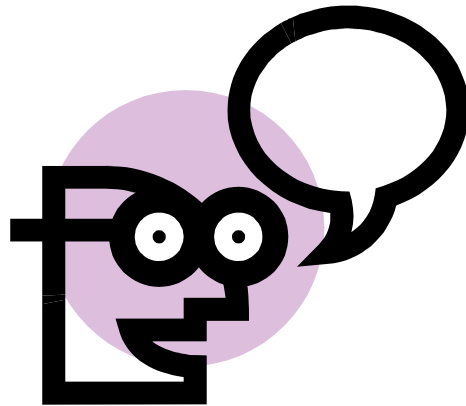


NUTRITION 101

SPEAKING WITH PATIENTS ABOUT NUTRITION

Practice Speaking With Patients About Nutrition



Practice Speaking with Patients about Nutrition

Speaking with Patients about Nutrition is designed as a very hands-on training. This training addresses the importance of “taking small steps,” using key messages that are simple and concrete, designing messages that can be delivered in a brief amount of time, and the importance of using visual and tactile tools.

Much of the training is focused on the use of tools designed to illustrate and support nutrition key messages already developed. A variety of activities and tools are presented to give health care workers options when speaking to patients. It is not expected that each message or tool will be used at every encounter – often it is best to use only one or two messages during any particular patient visit.

This training allows participants the opportunity to practice the use of the tools and to adapt the presentations to their individual style.



Taking Small Steps Can Make a Big Difference

Change can be difficult. Most of us don't need a study to confirm this – we know it from personal experience! Once we decide we want to change a behavior, or support someone else in so doing, we often make the mistake of trying to tackle too much in too short a time. If we are overweight we want to find a quick weight loss diet; if we are out of shape we want to see immediate results when we join the gym. Then we may become frustrated with our attempt at a quick fix and give up. Or, if we do succeed, if we don't install the new behavior adequately, we may find that it lasts only temporarily– we are unable to sustain the changes.

Sustainable change, by definition, involves lifestyle change – changing our long-term habits. This means making small enough changes that they can easily become part of our everyday routines. Succeeding at small steps also builds self-confidence. Once we have successfully met a goal, no matter how small, it is easier to believe we can accomplish other goals.

Behavior change is a complex process. We do things for conscious and unconscious reasons. While it is true that positive habits result from positive intentions, it is also true that negative habits are sustained by positive intentions. “I eat sweets because it makes me feel better.” In this case, the positive intention is wanting to feel better. People feel understood when there is an acknowledgement of this internal conflict. Even if they're not aware of their own positive intention, it's important to presume there is one. It's also important to recognize when a person is *not* motivated to work on a particular issue because of serious internal conflict, so you can focus on changes that can be made more easily– and leave the complex stuff to the therapist.

For a person with obesity, for example, changing from regular soda to unsweetened iced tea may seem like a small step, but it can be a very powerful step. Experiences of success lead to greater self-confidence and can empower a person to create long-term lifestyle changes. Never underestimate the power of a small step in a positive direction.

SUMMARY:

- Change can be difficult
- Quick fixes, after a long period of installing the unwanted behavior, tend not to be sustainable
- Lifestyle changes are sustainable
- Behavior change is complex – leave the complex stuff to the therapist
- Small and sustainable changes build self-confidence – never underestimate the power of a small step



Use Key Messages

Key messages are the messages you want your audience (patients) to remember and act on. They are the core of the information you are trying to communicate – they chunk down a lot of information and research into a memorable phrase.

Creating key messages forces you to focus on what you really want to say, and using key messages helps you to stay focused during the interaction. When you know your key messages, you do not need to come up with the right thought or phrasing, and instead you can actually practice your delivery of the message while using supporting tools.

SUMMARY:

- Key messages are the messages you want your audience to remember and act on
- Creating key messages forces you to focus
- Using key messages keeps you focused
- Key messages allow you to prepare more easily



Present Key Messages in a Simple and Concrete Manner

For effective communication, your key messages need to be simple and concrete. Simple means that you strip an idea down to its core – its most critical essence. It also needs to be compact – expressing an idea clearly and concisely, avoiding wordiness and unnecessary jargon. And finally a simple message is profound, expressing a deep truth.

“You are what you eat” is an example of a great simple message. It is the essence of a message that many writers have written countless books about. At only five words, it is certainly compact and it is most definitely a profound statement.

Concrete refers to something that is tangible and real – it is the opposite of abstract. “Strategic organizational infrastructure alliance” is an abstract way of saying, “planning meeting.” Concrete language helps people to understand exactly what you mean, while abstraction often confounds meaning.

SUMMARY:

- Key messages need to be simple and concrete
- Simple messages strip an idea to its core
- Simple messages are compact
- Simple messages can be profound
- Concrete messages present tangible and real images
- Abstraction often confounds meaning



Design Messages and Interactions That Can Be Delivered in a Brief Amount of Time

There are two primary reasons for designing messages and interactions that are brief:

1. **There is simply not enough time for long messages and interactions!** Have you ever heard clinic or hospital staffs complain of having too much time on their hands?
2. **You risk overloading the patient with too much information.** Patients are often anxious in a clinical setting – particularly when they are dealing with a difficult health issue. Stress makes it difficult to hear, understand, and remember new information.

How much time is enough? Obviously this will depend on your circumstances as well as the patient's response. If you have time, and a patient is interested, of course we would advocate for an in-depth discussion.

Time is often a barrier, however, so we are suggesting that you plan for the worst-case-scenario which all too often is a brief encounter with the patient.



Use Visual and Tactile Tools

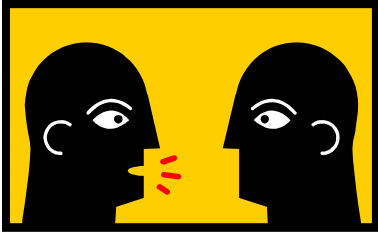
How do we make something memorable? How do we ensure that our message has been received? If you've had the experience of teaching something, you may have gotten responses such as these: One person may say "I see what you mean," another "I hear what you say," and yet another, "I have a handle on it."

These metaphors reflect people's preferred sensory systems for optimal learning, since we each learn best in a particular way. One system is not better or worse than another, just different. If you present information using as many sensory systems as possible, you ensure that every member of your audience has the opportunity to receive it in their preferred system. Further, when individuals receive information in multiple sensory systems, their learning is likely to be stronger. So getting information in your preferred system makes learning easier, and getting it in multiple systems makes it stronger.

Written words are good. Reading and speaking the words are great. Combining words with visuals and tactile objects is spectacular!

SUMMARY:

- People have preferred sensory systems for optimal learning
- Providing information in different sensory systems makes learning easier
- Providing information in different sensory systems makes learning stronger



Getting the Conversation Started

“How much soda do you drink?”

“What do you typically eat for lunch/dinner?”

“How much fat do you think you’re getting in your diet?”

The best way to open a conversation about nutrition is to ask an open-ended question. An open-ended question is one in which the answer requires more than a “yes” or “no” or other single word answer. This approach encourages a conversation about nutrition, and when you develop a repertoire of standard questions you no longer have to worry about how to initiate that first conversation.

Many health care providers remain wary about bringing up the subject of weight control. By starting your conversation with a focus on good nutrition – instead of weight control – you avoid beginning the conversation on a negative or critical note. Then you can point out that healthy eating really is a universal goal – regardless of weight and one of the positive consequences of healthy eating is weight-control.

When you pair your open-ended questions with your key messages (e.g. “Avoid liquid candy”) and tools (e.g. Sugar in Soda Bottle), you are ready with the right questions and with the appropriate visual tools to reinforce your message.

SUMMARY:

- Ask open-ended questions
- Develop a repertoire of questions
- Start with a focus on good nutrition and then address weight control
- Pair open-ended questions with key messages and visual tools



The Key Messages

- **Cut the Salt**
- **Choose Foods with Good Fats**
- **Choose Whole Grains**
- **Eat More Colors – Fruits and Vegetables Matter**
- **Don't Drink Your Calories**
- **Taking Small Steps Can Make a Big Difference**