

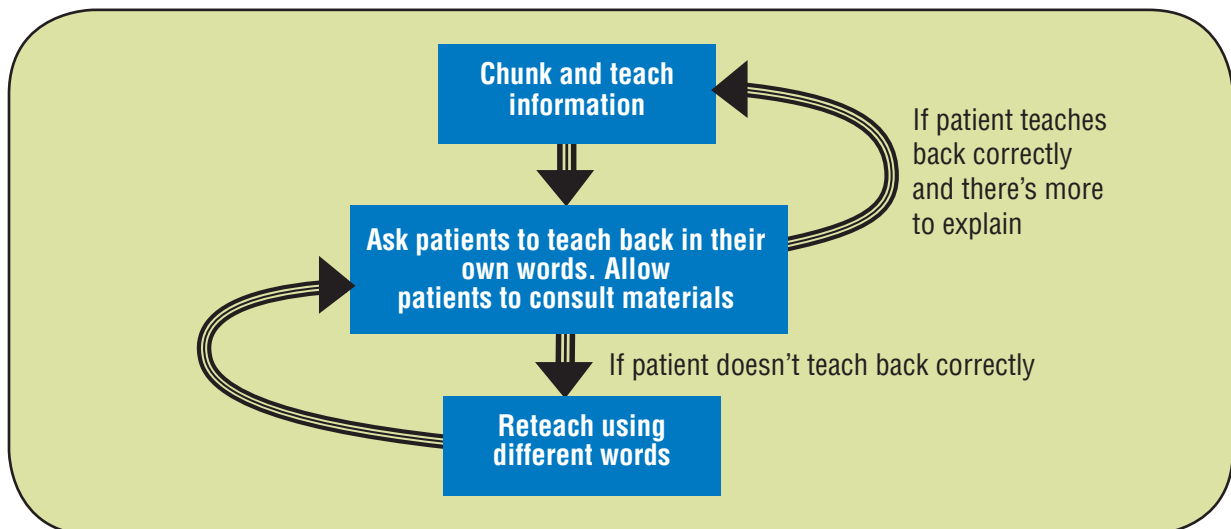
MORE EFFORT IS NEEDED TO ENSURE PATIENTS UNDERSTAND DOCTORS' INSTRUCTIONS

Did you know? Many patients leave their healthcare visit unsure of what their provider asked them to do or what was discussed. Nationwide, only 12% of adults have proficient health literacy.¹ That means almost 9 out of 10 Americans find it challenging “to obtain, process, and understand basic health information and services needed to make appropriate health decisions.”²



Several communication strategies help patients and providers understand each other better, including the teach-back method. It is an evidence-based technique to confirm that people have explained things in a manner others understand.³ When healthcare providers use teach-back with their patients, they ask them to describe in their own words what they have heard. If patients cannot teach the information back correctly, providers have to instruct them again using a different way of explaining, until patients are able to teach back what they have learned correctly.

Teach-Back Method

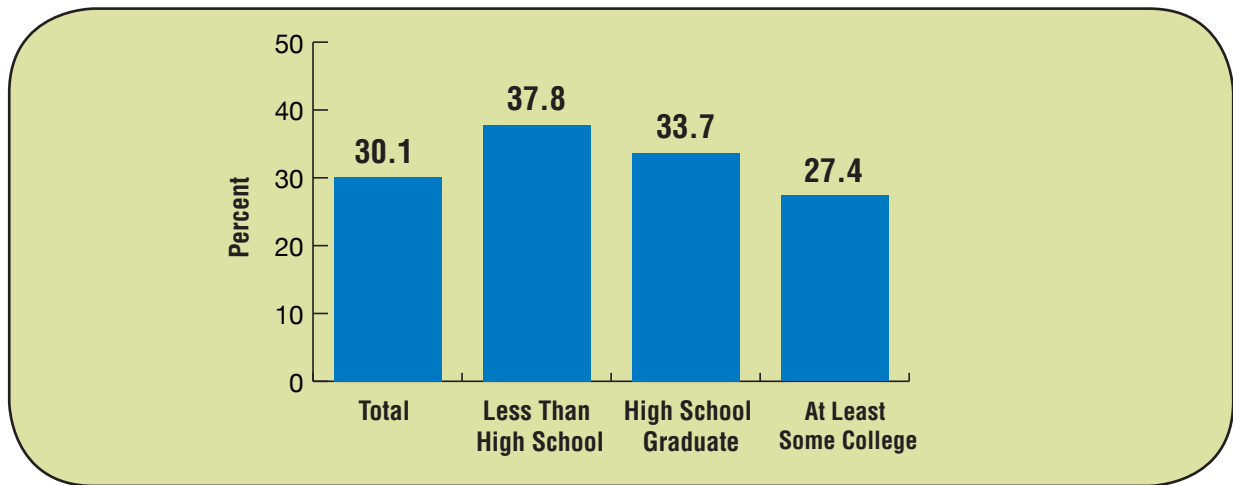


Source: Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality.

Data from the Medical Expenditure Panel Survey (MEPS) show that fewer than one-third (30.1%) of adults whose provider gave them instructions reported being asked to describe how they would follow the instructions (e.g., teach the information back). The [National Healthcare Quality and Disparities Report](#) (NHQDR)⁴ team also found significant disparities by education status, race, and ethnicity among adults whose providers initiated teach-back with them.



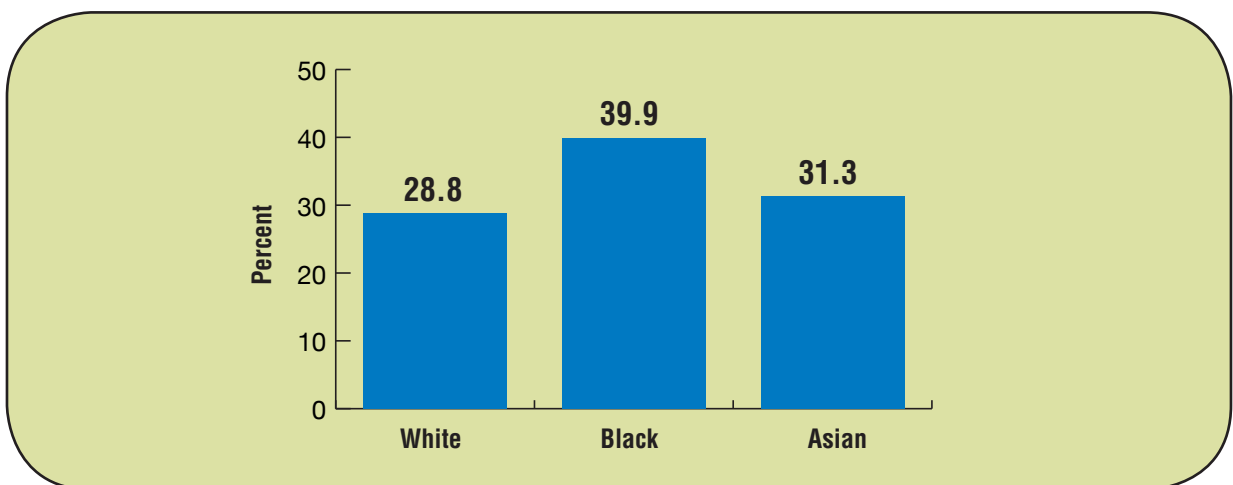
Adults who had a doctor's office or clinic visit in the last 12 months whose healthcare providers always asked them to describe how they would follow the instructions, by education, 2015



Source: Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, Medical Expenditure Panel Survey, 2015.

- ◆ The percentage of adults whose healthcare providers always asked them to describe how they would follow instructions increased as education level decreased: 37.8% of adults with less than a high school education, 33.7% of high school graduates, and 27.4% of adults with at least some college education.

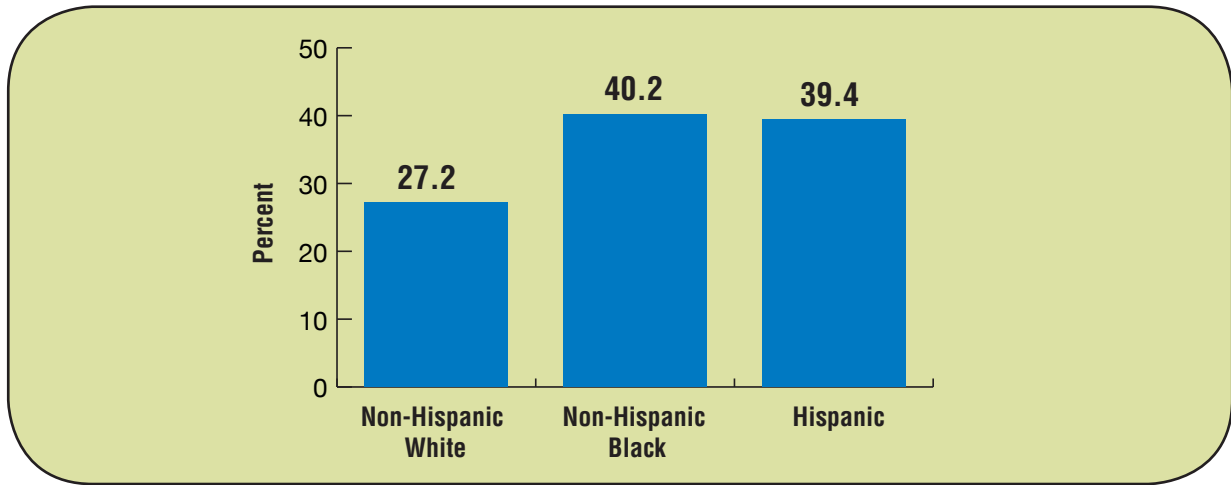
Adults who had a doctor's office or clinic visit in the last 12 months whose healthcare providers always asked them to describe how they would follow the instructions, by race, 2015



Source: Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, Medical Expenditure Panel Survey, 2015.

- ◆ Black adults (39.9%) were more likely than White adults (28.8%) and Asian adults (31.3%) to have healthcare providers who always asked them to describe how they would follow instructions. There were no statistically significant differences between Whites and Asians.

Adults who had a doctor’s office or clinic visit in the last 12 months whose healthcare providers always asked them to describe how they would follow the instructions, by ethnicity, 2015



Source: Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, Medical Expenditure Panel Survey, 2015.

- ◆ Hispanic adults (39.4%) and non-Hispanic Black adults (40.2%) were more likely than non-Hispanic White adults (27.2%) to have healthcare providers who always asked them to describe how they would follow instructions.

To access these data, go to the [NHQDR Data Query Tool](#). A related [infographic](#) is available.

The data indicate that providers need to be more diligent about checking patients’ understanding of their care. Federal programs are working to ensure that all Americans always receive health-literate care, including the following Department of Health and Human Services programs:

- ◆ AHRQ funds many projects that support improved communication within the healthcare team and with patients and families. Among them are:
 - » The [Guide to Improving Patient Safety in Primary Care Settings by Engaging Patients and Families](#), which features a [teach-back intervention](#).
 - » The AHRQ [Health Literacy Universal Precautions Toolkit](#), which helps primary care practices promote greater understanding for all patients. It includes several strategies, including [teach-back](#).
- ◆ The National Institute on Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases encourages the use of teach-back with all patients, regardless of their education level. A [video of a real doctor using teach-back](#) is available.

References

1. Kutner M, Greenberg E, Jin Y, et al. The health literacy of America's adults: results from the 2003 National Assessment of Adult Literacy. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education; 2006. Publication No. NCES 2006-483. https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2006/2006483_1.pdf. Accessed February 6, 2019. This survey is the only national assessment of health literacy to date.
2. Institute of Medicine. Health literacy: a prescription to end confusion. Washington, DC: National Academies Press; 2004. <https://www.nap.edu/catalog/10883/health-literacy-a-prescription-to-end-confusion>. Accessed February 6, 2019.
3. Schillinger D, Piette J, Grumbach K, et al. Closing the loop: physician communication with diabetic patients who have low health literacy. *Arch Intern Med* 2003;163(1):83-90.
4. Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality. National Healthcare Quality and Disparities Reports. <http://www.ahrq.gov/research/findings/nhqrd/index.html>. Accessed February 6, 2019.

