

WHAT MATTERS

Communications 101



The Basics:

Many older adults (especially those who are younger than 85) have no problem with everyday communication.

First, make sure that the older adult you are communicating with can see, hear, and understand you.

General Tips:

Show the older adult respect. Address them “Mr.,” “Mrs.” or “Ms.,” unless you are asked not to.

After you convey information, ask the older adult if what you said made sense. Do not assume that everything you said was understood.

Use simple language and avoid medical or technical terms.

Do your homework so that you really understand what you are trying to communicate. This will help you simplify the complex information in advance.

Improve your general communication and presentation skills. This will help you communicate with older adults too.

Observe and learn the older adult’s preferred communication or conversation style. Use this style, if possible.

Check how you convey your message. Aim to communicate at the 5th – 10th-grade levels. You can use online tools to help determine the grade level associated with your language. These tools include: <https://readabilityformulas.com/free-readability-formula-tests.php>

Get to know the older adult and help the older adult get to know you.



Communicating with an Older Adult who has Cognitive Challenges:

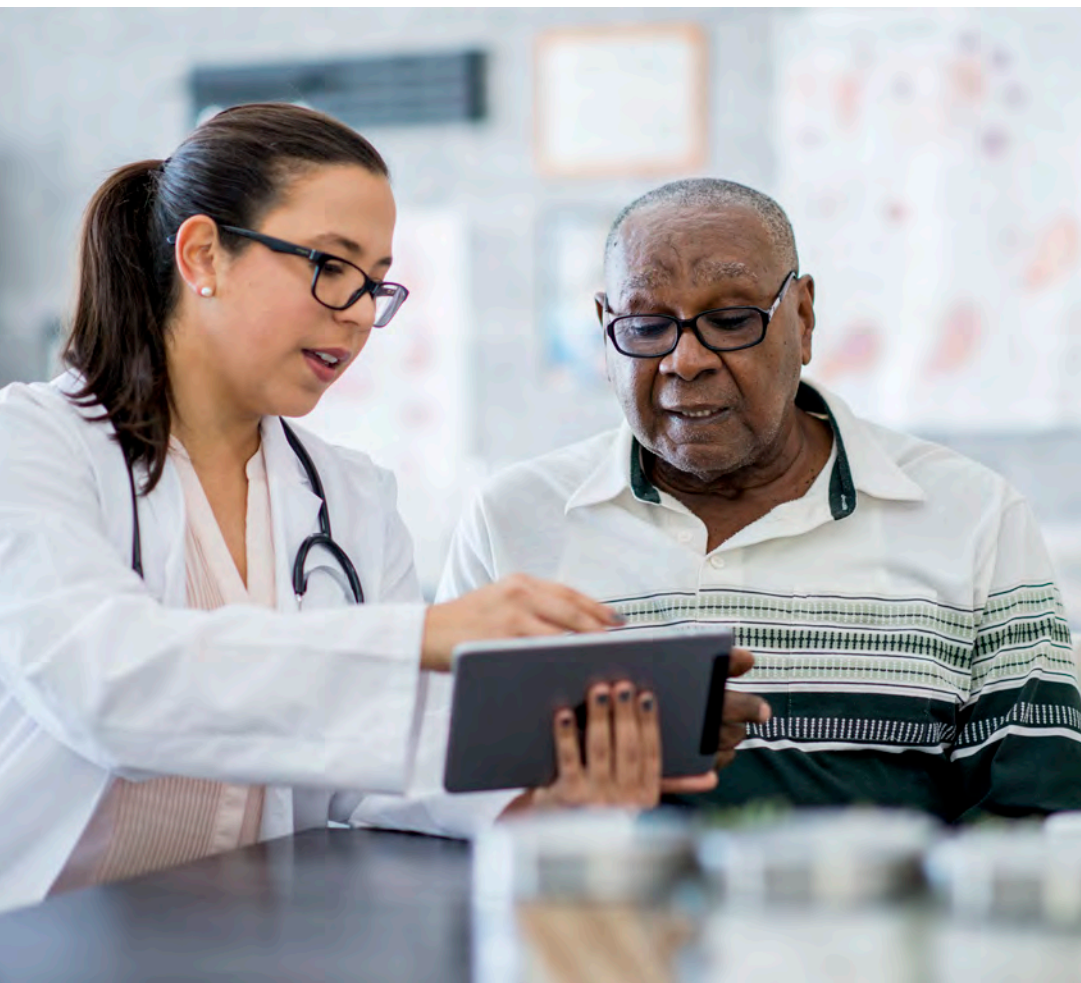
- Repeat and review important health care information multiple times.
- Listen extra carefully and do not interrupt during communication.
- Give the older adult additional time to digest information.

Communicating with an Older Adult who has Visual Challenges:

- Check the lighting and make sure that the room is bright.
- Use at least 18-point size font in any written communication.
- Make sure that glasses and magnifying glasses are ready and available to the older adult.

Communicating with an Older Adult who has Hearing Challenges:

- Avoid noisy and distracting environments when communicating.
- Use gestures and visual aids to help convey information.
- Speak slowly and louder than you might otherwise.
- Encourage the use of hearing aids during communication.



Good Practice:

- Combine the above tips as needed, depending on the older adult.
- Give older adults important information in writing or refer them to easily-accessible websites in case they need a refresher.
- If you are having communication problems, take a note and ask a health professional or communication specialist to resolve it before any future communications.

