

Improving Medication Adherence Among Patients with Hypertension

A Tip Sheet for Health Care Professionals



Medication adherence is critical to successful hypertension control for many patients. However, only 51% of Americans treated for hypertension follow their health care professional's advice when it comes to their long-term medication therapy.

Adherence matters. High adherence to antihypertensive medication is associated with higher odds of blood pressure control, but non-adherence to cardio-protective medications increases a patient's risk of death from 50% to 80%.

As a health care professional, you can empower patients to take their medications as prescribed. Effective two-way communication is critical; in fact, it doubles the odds of your patients taking their medications properly. Try to understand your patients' barriers and address them honestly to build trust.

Predictors of Non-Adherence

When discussing medications, be aware if your patient

- ▶ Demonstrates limited English language proficiency or low literacy.
- ▶ Has a history of mental health issues like depression, anxiety, or addiction.
- ▶ Doesn't believe in the benefits of treatment.
- ▶ Believes medications are unnecessary or harmful.
- ▶ Has a concern about medication side effects.
- ▶ Expresses concern over the cost of medications.
- ▶ Says he or she is tired of taking medications.

These can all be predictors of a patient who may struggle with adherence to medication.

Medication Adherence by the Numbers



**For every 100
prescriptions
written...**

50-70
go to a
pharmacy

48-66
come out
of the
pharmacy

25-30
are taken
properly

15-20
are refilled
as prescribed



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Million Hearts® is a national initiative to prevent 1 million heart attacks and strokes by 2017. It is led by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services, two agencies of the Department of Health and Human Services.

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Use the SIMPLE method to help improve medication adherence among your patients

Simplify the regimen

- Encourage patients to use adherence tools, like day-of-the-week pill boxes or mobile apps.
- Work to match the action of taking medication with a patient's daily routine (e.g., meal time or bed time, with other medications they already take properly, etc.).

Impart knowledge

- Write down prescription instructions clearly, and reinforce them verbally.
- Provide websites for additional reading and information—find suggestions at the **Million Hearts®** website.

Modify patients' beliefs and behavior

- Provide positive reinforcement when patients take their medication successfully, and offer incentives if possible.
- Talk to patients to understand and address their concerns or fears.

Provide communication and trust

- Allow patients to speak freely. Time is of the essence, but research shows most patients will talk no longer than 2 minutes when given the opportunity.
- Use plain language when speaking with patients. Say, "Did you take all of your pills?" instead of using the word "adherence."
- Ask for patients' input when discussing recommendations and making decisions.
- Remind patients to contact your office with any questions.

Leave the bias

- Understand the predictors of non-adherence and address them as needed with patients.
- Ask patients specific questions about attitudes, beliefs, and cultural norms related to taking medications.

Evaluate adherence

- Ask patients simply and directly if they are sticking to their drug regimen.
- Use a medication adherence scale—most are available online:
 - Morisky-8 (MMAS-8)
 - Morisky-4 (MMAS-4 or Medication Adherence Questionnaire)
 - Medication Possession Ratio (MPR)
 - Proportion of Days Covered (PDC)

Find and download additional materials to help your patients control hypertension at the **Million Hearts®** website.