

The ten-minute preoperative education session

A structure you can hold in your head. Do not read it to the patient.

	Step	Min	What you actually say / do
1	What will happen	1.5	Plainly, in order, from arrival to going home. No jargon, no percentages.
2	What we will do for you	1.5	The anaesthetic, how we will control pain, how we will prevent sickness.
3	What YOU will do	2	The drink. The breathing. The walking. The eating. Give them the job, not the theory.
4	What normal looks like	2	Milestones by day. Hand them the milestone card and point at each day as you say it.
5	What is NOT normal	1.5	The warning signs, and exactly who to telephone. Write the number on the card in front of them.
6	Your questions	1	Ask for them by name: “What questions do you have?” — not “Any questions?” after a monologue.
7	Teach-back	0.5	Check three things: the fasting rule, their day-1 job, and one warning sign.

Teach-back — the exact wording

Never say	Say instead	Why
“Do you understand?”	“I want to be sure I explained that clearly — can you tell me what you'll do the morning of your operation?”	The burden sits on your explanation, not their intelligence. Nobody has to admit to being confused.
“Any questions?”	“What questions do you have?”	The first invites silence. The second assumes questions exist, which they always do.
“Is that all clear?”	“Tell me in your own words what happens on day one.”	Asks for a demonstration rather than a yes.

If the patient cannot say it back, explain it **differently** — not louder, and not again in the same words. Repeating yourself at higher volume is the commonest response and the least effective one.

Include the family, every time

In most Ethiopian hospitals the family provides food, supervision and physical support on the ward, which makes them part of the pathway whether you involve them or not. A family that has not been told will act on tradition — rest, rich food later, no walking — and they will do it out of love, which makes it very hard to argue with afterwards. Teach the family the same milestones at the same time, and give them a specific job: “walk with her four times a day”, “bring the drink at these times”.

Session record

Patient	Family member present	Delivered by	Date	Teach-back passed on 3 points
				☐ Yes ☐ Partially — repeat before surgery