

Teach-back prompt card

Pocket card. Three checks, every patient.

Never ask “Do you understand?” Everybody says yes, because saying no is embarrassing.

The three checks

Check	The exact words to use	A good answer sounds like
1. The fasting rule	“I want to be sure I explained this clearly — can you tell me what you can eat and drink tomorrow morning, and until what time?”	“No food after 3 in the morning, and I can have water and tea without milk until 7.”
2. Their day-1 job	“Tell me in your own words what you'll be doing the day after your operation.”	“Eating, and getting out of bed — three hours, but not all at once.”
3. One warning sign	“If you were at home and something went wrong, what would make you telephone us?”	“If I got a fever, or the pain got worse instead of better.”

If they cannot say it back

☐	Explain it differently — a different example, a picture, a number they can hold
☐	Do not repeat the same words louder
☐	Use the milestone card and point at each line as you say it
☐	Bring in a family member and explain it to both of them together
☐	Write the key instruction down in front of them, in their language
☐	Check again — teach-back is not a single event

Design your words for the patient you actually have

Instead of	Say
“50 grams of carbohydrate”	“Four spoons of sugar in a big glass of water”
“Early mobilisation is part of the protocol”	“Your job tomorrow is to be out of bed for three hours — that's how you avoid a chest infection”
“Clear fluids”	“Anything you can see through — water, tea without milk”
“The nurses will get you up”	“Ask us to help you up — that's what we're here for”
“Nil by mouth”	“No food after this time. You can still drink water until this time.”

Assume limited health literacy by default. It is common at every level of education and it gets worse under stress — which is exactly the state your patient is in. This is not condescension; it is accuracy about how people take in information the day before an operation.