

Talking with Patients about Numbers

Quick Guide for Patient-Facing Professionals

Based on the podcast episode "[How do we talk about numbers?](#)" which reminds us that adults already use numbers meaningfully as part of everyday life. In patient education, it is helpful to focus on how your patient already uses numbers everyday, in order to explain a new numerical concept

Before the conversation



Prep in 60 seconds

- Identify the decision that involves risk or probability.
- Prepare key numbers (time, probability, risk, change with options).
- Consider the patient's everyday experience with numbers.
- Anticipate emotions or concerns, but be ready to listen.

During the conversation



Person-centered

- Acknowledge the complexity of the situation and decision *"There's complex __ involved"*
- Affirm people's capabilities with numbers, risk, probability *"But there's parallels to some complex calculations people do every day"*
- Situate your numbers in the everyday *"If you've ever had to deal with __ or pay attention to __, you've dealt with numbers like these. Do you ever do something like this?"*
- Make and invite explicit connections between everyday numbers and your numbers *"Here's what I see as the similarities... you may see others..."*

After the conversation



Decide together & plan next steps

- Confirm the shared decision and/or next steps.
- Document key preferences or concerns.
- Give a take-home visual or link.
- Ask: what else is going on in your life that's on your mind?

