

Communicating With Adolescents About Cardiovascular Disease Risk

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Assessing and addressing the risks of cardiovascular disease (CVD) for patients during their adolescence (10-19 years of age) is critical for promoting long-term cardiovascular health. CVD risk factors, which include smoking, poor diet, and physical inactivity,^{1,2} and stressors, such as socioeconomic vulnerability,^{3,4} contribute to early-onset atherosclerotic changes and subsequent CVD morbidity and mortality.⁵

Strategies such as the Institute for Healthcare Improvement's *Ask Me 3*^{6,7} may help providers successfully communicate with adolescents and their families to assess CVD risk factors and provide health recommendations. The *Ask Me 3*[®] patient education tool encourages patients to ask three questions of their providers during appointments to help understand their health conditions and treatment plans and improve patient-provider communication.^{6,7}

Positive clinical encounters prompt active engagement in self-care and can empower adolescents to become their own health care advocates.⁸ Early intervention, comprehensive assessment, and effective communication can help adolescents prioritize and manage their cardiovascular health effectively, which leads to improved long-term cardiovascular outcomes.

For more information, access Cardi-OH's expanded resources on [CVD in adolescents](#) and [health literacy](#).



Step-By-Step Process for Implementing *Ask Me 3*[®]

- 1. Introduce *Ask Me 3*[®]:** Provide brochures at check-in and display signage in patient rooms. Explain the tool and how it is used to help patients get the information they need to better manage their health.
- 2. Teach the Three Questions:** Invite your patients to ask the three questions.
 - "What is my main problem?"
 - "What do I need to do about it?"
 - "Why is it important for me to do this?"
- 3. Encourage Practice:** Have check-in and rooming staff recommend that patients ask these three questions to ensure they fully understand their diagnosis, treatment options, and the importance of adhering to their treatment plan. Have check-out staff ask whether all of the questions were answered. If not, adjust follow-up accordingly.
- 4. Provide Support:** Be patient and supportive. Create a safe and open environment for communication.
- 5. Use Patient-Friendly Language:** When providing explanations, use language that is easy for patients to understand. Have patients repeat what they have heard. Use open-ended questions to encourage feedback (i.e., "What questions do you have?" instead of "Do you have any questions?").
- 6. Include the Strategy in Patient Education Materials:** Consider incorporating *Ask Me 3*[®] into patient education materials, such as brochures or handouts.

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