

## Communication Tips

When discussing cardiovascular risk factors, health care providers should prioritize building trust and empathy with patients. Engaging in conversations about risk factors often occur during emotionally charged moments, such as after a new diagnosis or when discussing risk factors that have just been recently discovered.

Patients may feel overwhelmed, which can hinder their ability to make decisions about what risk factor should take priority over another. Providers should validate these emotions, listen actively, and tailor their communication to the patient's readiness to change their behaviour. Changing behaviour is difficult and often habits are formed early in life. Deciding to change how you live is challenging, especially if life circumstances or environmental influences impact on ability to choose wisely.

Personalizing the conversation is essential. Risk should be framed in the context of the patient's unique circumstances, risk factors, and goals. Some patients may be open to speaking more about their risk, while others may not be quite ready to discuss and may require a return appointment. Understanding and individualizing care allows providers to tailor their approach, whether it's emphasizing the benefits of lifestyle changes or discussing the consequences of not acting soon.

Providers should also consider prior experiences, cultural beliefs, and competing life priorities that may influence how patients perceive and respond to risk. A collaborative, patient-centered approach enhances shared decision-making and promotes long-term engagement in management of cardiovascular risk factors. My Heart and Brain Healthy Plan is a tool that providers can use with their patients on their journey to lower their risk and lead to improved health and quality of life.