

COMMUNICATING RISK

Tailor conversations about levels of risk to patient learning styles and needs.

Talk with your patient about their level of cancer risk (average, increased, high) based on your assessment. People understand risk differently, and it can be helpful to communicate risk in multiple ways to facilitate patient understanding.

PARTICIPANTS

Provider, patient, possibly family members

BARRIERS

Provider ability to tailor risk communication, patients with limited health literacy, patients with limited numeracy, patients may not be in contact with at-risk relatives, limited existing resources to aid in family communication

PRACTICE THIS SKILL

[Web based module on Categorizing Cancer Risk](#)

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[Communicating Risk Factsheet](#)

[Understanding Cancer Risk](#)

STEPS

- 1 Tailor risk communication to the specific individual. People interpret and react to risk numbers differently based on many factors. Try to frame risk in multiple ways to facilitate understanding: quantitative or qualitative, which may include absolute and relative risks (see examples below). It can be helpful to compare the patient's risk to the general population to promote understanding of the increase in risk based on your assessment.
- 2 Consider using visuals and teaching tools. Illustrations and factsheets may be helpful to reinforce important information. Visual representations of risk such as pictographs and bar graphs can help the patient understand his or her personal risk.
- 3 Recommend that your patient share risk information with relatives. When your patient's history affects his or her relatives' risk, clinicians have a duty to warn their patients about the risk of the condition among relatives and encourage the patient to communicate about their risk. This is especially important if there is a positive genetic test result.

Table 3: Risk Communication Examples

<i>For an individual with about a 10% lifetime risk of colorectal cancer when the general population risk is about 5%.</i>	
Quantitative:	Risk given in fractions or percentages
Absolute	"You have about a 10% chance to develop colon cancer in your lifetime, compared to the average person with a 5% chance."
	"You have about a 1 in 10 risk of colon cancer."
Relative	"Your chance to develop colon cancer is doubled ."
	"You are twice as likely to develop colon cancer than an individual without your risk factors."
Qualitative	Risk given in descriptive terms
	"Your risk is increased compared to the general population."