

Tip #56
(Effective Use of Handouts)

*The greatest good you can do for another
is not just to share your riches,
but to reveal to him his own.*
Benjamin Disraeli

*The mind is not a vessel to be filled
but a fire to be kindled.*
Plutarch

Supplemental materials can **complement and support** what you communicate to a client. It may be a simple one-page sheet with food lists or a more comprehensive booklet that reinforces your main points about the client's condition or diet recommendations. Forms or booklets can also help the client to monitor her food intake, food triggers, and appetite.

A distinct **benefit** of these take-home materials is to aid a client's memory. In addition, you may not get to all the details in a session and rely on take-home materials to fill in the gaps. There are **a few disadvantages** of relying on handouts. They can detract from your focus on this client's unique needs. They may also give you the mistaken impression that you have finished your job, that the client has accepted the information in the handouts and will follow the recommendations.

Of course, materials need to fit the language, education level and culture of your client, but the most wonderful handouts will be useful only when embedded in a respectful counseling process. These same processes can be **used for all the resources** you offer the client. These may include Web sites, classes, support groups, and video and audio presentations. When you take a minute or two to find out your client's learning style and readiness, you will be most effective. Just as important, you will demonstrate respect, and the client will more likely use the materials.

Integrating handouts effectively

- Ask what **types of materials and processes** work best for this particular client. "Are you the kind of person who likes to have papers to refer to when you get home?" or "Some of my clients find this booklet handy to have at home. Some people prefer I suggest Web sites, and others like to find books in the library. What is your style?" or "Would you like me to go over what is in this booklet or do you like to read things on your own and then come back and ask questions later?"

- **Ask your client about each handout** before you give it. For example, “I have a handy sheet that has all these foods listed on it. Would this be useful to you?”
- Suggest the client **take notes** if it would be useful to her. “We are talking about a lot of different things here. Would it be helpful for you to take notes or would you like me to jot down the main points?” Those in private practice may want to have notepads printed with their name and contact information.
- Whenever you can, **link your materials** to specific things the client has asked you for. A client who complains she has little time to prepare meals may be ready for your handout on simple meal ideas or on how to choose healthy take-out foods. Ask her which she would be most interested in. A client who talks of feeling alone with her diagnosis may be ready to hear about a support group.
- At the end of a session, **ask the client if more is needed**. “Let’s look back at what we covered today and what materials you have. Is there more that we have missed? What will you need to have at home to make these changes we talked about?”
- If you are relying on a handout to cover material that you didn’t have time to cover, make this clear to the client. You might also ask whether the client wants the handout now or would prefer to wait until another session when you have time to review it together. Even if most accept the materials, by asking you are **empowering clients to take charge of the process**.
- Finally, **attend to your client** as you offer the material. Maintain eye contact and observe body language. If you notice reluctance, ask again if she is interested or needs something else from you.

Excerpted from **Counseling Tips for Nutrition Therapists**

© Molly Kellogg, 2004.

www.mollykellogg.com