

## Do you know how to load?

Having an autoclave in good working condition is just the beginning. You also need to ensure your teammates know how to load instruments and packs correctly for optimal results.

- An autoclave should never be overloaded. It is better to run two cycles with smaller loads, than a single cycle with an autoclave filled to the brim. Sadly, overloading happens much more frequently than practitioners realize.
- Pouches should not be stacked horizontally. Instead, they should be placed flat and sterilized one at a time. This is called “single height loading.”
- If you place a pouch flat, the paper side should face up, and the plastic side should face down. This allows moisture to escape through the paper side (hot air goes up).
- Pouches placed vertically (*i.e.* side by side on a rack) should have enough air between them to allow for ventilation. You can purchase commercial racks made for this purpose.
- Pouches should not touch the inner sides of the autoclave, as the inside gets hot and can burn them.
- Ensure instruments are clean and dry before wrapping them.
- At the end of a cycle, the door should be open as soon as possible to allow the equipment to dry and to prevent items from burning due to excessive heat exposure.
- Instrument packs should not touch each other in the autoclave so that steam can circulate between them.
- Remember that sterilization tape only means the surface of a pack was sterilized. It does not ensure the deepest part of the pack is sterile. This is the reason why a sterilization strip must be placed deep inside a pack (not in the top layer, as is often done).

Following these simple guidelines will help ensure true sterilization has been accomplished.