

English in Medicine

A course in communication skills

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1 Taking a history 1



Section 1 Asking basic questions

Task 1



You will hear an extract from an interview between a doctor and his patient. As you listen, complete the Present Complaint section of the case notes below.

SURNAME <i>Hall</i>	FIRST NAMES <i>Kevin</i>
AGE <i>32</i> SEX <i>M</i>	MARITAL STATUS <i>M</i>
OCCUPATION <i>Lorry driver</i>	
PRESENT COMPLAINT	

Now compare your notes with those made by the doctor. These are given in the Key on p. 105. Explain these sections in the notes.

- 1 SEX M
- 2 MARITAL STATUS M
- 3 3/12
- 4 a.m.
- 5 "dull, throbbing" Why are these words in quote marks (" ")?
- 6 %

Language focus 1

Note how the doctor starts the interview:

- *What's brought you along today?*

Other ways of starting an interview are:

- *What can I do for you?*
- *What seems to be the problem?*

Note how the doctor asks how long the problem has lasted.

- *How long have they been bothering you?*

Another way of asking about this is:

- *How long have you had them?*

Task 2



Study this short dialogue.

DOCTOR: Well, Mrs Black. *What's brought you along today?*

PATIENT: I've got a bad dose of flu. (1)

DOCTOR: *How long has it been bothering you?*

PATIENT: Two or three days. (2)

Practise this dialogue. Your partner should play the part of the patient. He or she can select replies from lists (1) and (2) below. Use all the ways of starting an interview and asking how long the problem has lasted.

(1)

a bad dose of flu
terrible constipation
swollen ankles
a pain in my stomach

(2)

two or three days
since Tuesday
a fortnight
for almost a month

Language focus 2

Note how the doctor asks where the problem is:

- *Which part of your head is affected?*

Other ways of finding this out are:

- *Where does it hurt?**
- *Where is it sore?**

Note how the doctor asks about the type of pain:

- *Can you describe the pain?*

Other ways of asking this are:

- *What's the pain like?*
- *What kind of pain is it?*

* *Hurt* is a verb. We use it like this: *My foot hurts.*

Sore is an adjective. We can say: *My foot is sore* or *I have a sore foot.*

Task 3



Practise finding out information like this. Work in the same way as in Task 2. Use all the methods given in Language focus 2 in your questioning.

DOCTOR: *Which part of your head (chest, back, etc.) is affected?*

PATIENT: **Just here.**

DOCTOR: *Can you describe the pain?*

PATIENT: **It's a dull sort of ache. (1)**

(1)

a dull sort of ache

a feeling of pressure

very sore, like a knife

a burning pain

Language focus 3

Note how the doctor asks if anything relieves the pain of headaches:

– *Is there anything that makes them better?**

Similarly he can ask:

– *Does anything make them worse?*

Doctors often ask if anything else affects the problem. For example:

– *What effect does food have?*

– *Does lying down help the pain?*

* *Better* means *improved* or *relieved*. It does not mean *cured*.

Task 4



Work with a partner. In each of these cases, ask your partner where the pain is. Then ask two other appropriate questions to help you reach a diagnosis. There is a diagram in the Key showing your partner where to indicate in each case. Use all the ways of questioning we have studied in this section. For example:

DOCTOR: *Where does it hurt?*

PATIENT: **Right across here.** (indicating the central chest area)

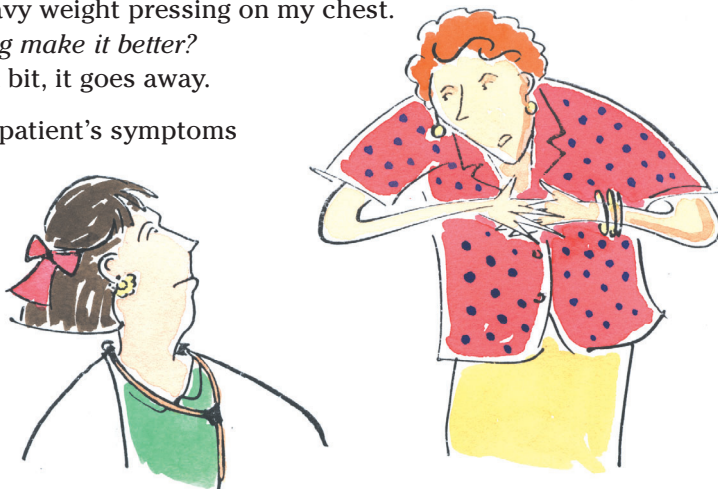
DOCTOR: *Can you describe the pain?*

PATIENT: **It's like a heavy weight pressing on my chest.**

DOCTOR: *Does anything make it better?*

PATIENT: **If I stop for a bit, it goes away.**

In this example, the patient's symptoms suggest angina.



Now try each of these four cases in the same way.

- 1 DOCTOR:
PATIENT: **Here, just under my ribs. (1)**
DOCTOR:
PATIENT: **It gets worse and worse. Then it goes away.**
DOCTOR:
PATIENT: **Food makes it worse.**
- 2 DOCTOR:
PATIENT: **It's right here. (2)**
DOCTOR:
PATIENT: **It's a gnawing kind of pain.**
DOCTOR:
PATIENT: **Yes, if I eat, it gets better.**
- 3 DOCTOR:
PATIENT: **Down here. (3)**
DOCTOR:
PATIENT: **It's a sharp, stabbing pain. It's like a knife.**
DOCTOR:
PATIENT: **If I take a deep breath, or I cough, it's really sore.**
- 4 DOCTOR:
PATIENT: **Just here. (4)**
DOCTOR:
PATIENT: **My chest feels raw inside.**
DOCTOR:
PATIENT: **When I cough, it hurts most.**

Task 5



Work in pairs. Student A should start.

- A: Play the part of the doctor. Repeat Task 4 but add two or three more questions in each case to help you decide on a diagnosis. For instance, in the example where the patient's symptoms suggest angina, you could ask:
- *Does anything make it worse?*
 - *How long does the pain last?*
 - *Is there anything else you feel at the same time?*
- B: Play the part of the patients. Use the replies in Task 4 and the extra information in the Key to help you.