

Unit 3: Describing Problems

A. Signs and Symptoms

Signs and symptoms are the tools for making a diagnosis, but what is the difference between the two? The **signs** of an illness are the things that a doctor or nurse can see and measure. Signs are things like spots and bleeding. Temperature, heart rate, blood pressure and respiration rate are all signs because you can measure them.

Symptoms are the things which a patient experiences, but others can't always see. Dizziness and nausea are examples of symptoms. The symptoms which make a patient seek medical help in the first place are called the presenting symptoms. Medics describe them in terms of being strong, mild or weak. Sometimes the symptoms of serious illnesses like cancer and diabetes are weak. They stay weak for a long time and the illness remains undiagnosed.

Many illnesses have the same symptoms. These symptoms are called non-specific. Fatigue is an example of this. It's a symptom of many kinds of illness, both chronic and acute, and of both physical and mental disorders. Doctors ask patients about the onset of the symptoms, what they feel like, what relieves them and what makes them worse. The more detail they have, the faster they can make a diagnosis.

Comprehension

Decide whether these statements are true (T) or false (F) according to the text.

- (1) _____ You need signs and symptoms for a diagnosis.
- (2) _____ You can't see symptoms.
- (3) _____ Patients presenting symptoms are strong, mild or weak.
- (4) _____ Killer diseases can have weak symptoms.
- (5) _____ Non-specific symptoms help a lot with diagnosis.
- (6) _____ Too much information slows up diagnosis.

B. Present Complaints

Patients say they **went to (see) the doctor**; doctors say the patient **presented**. The symptoms which cause a patient to visit a doctor or to **present** is call the **presenting symptoms, presenting complaint, or presentation**.

His / Her **presenting symptom** was chest pain.
presenting complaint

C. Talking about symptoms

Common questions a doctor would ask a patient	Common answer to describe symptoms
Are you short of breath?	I am congested / stuffed up / dizzy / nauseous / short of breath / tired / etc.
Can you describe that in more detail?	I have a cough / stuffy nose / headache / sore throat / fever / stomachache / etc.
Did it start suddenly?	I have chills / constipation / diarrhea / etc.
Did your condition change without any warning?	I vomited.
Do you have ...?	It burns.
Does anything make you feel better or worse?	My (foot, throat, finger etc.) is swollen / infected
Does your chest hurt when you take a deep breath?	My body aches.
What are your symptoms?	My pain is dull / sharp
What brings it on?	My sore has pus.
What do you mean by that?	
What do you think causes your condition?	
When did your symptoms start?	
When you cough, do you cough up any phlegm or sputum?	

D. Specific Terms for particular symptoms

Symptom	Meaning	Patients say
tiredness / lethargy / fatigue / lassitude	loss of energy	I feel tired all the time. / I feel completely worn out. / Lately, I've been feeling completely exhausted at the end of the day.
malaise	general feeling of being unwell	I feel unwell. / I don't feel well. / I've been feeling off-color for two days. / I haven't been feeling myself for a week.
anorexia	loss of appetite	My appetite is very poor. / I've been off my food for day. / I don't feel like eating. / I'm not eating.
weight gain	increase in weight	I've put on eight kilos in the last year. / I've gained five kilos. / I'm overweight.
weight loss	decrease in weight	I'm not eating any less than usual but I've lost a lot of weight. / I'm dropping kilos I'm dropping pounds.
constipation	hard, infrequent faeces	My motions are hard. / I've been quite constipated lately. / I'm not regular. / My stool is hard.

Note: The verb **feel** is also used with other adjectives, such as **hot, cold, nervous, anxious, dizzy, weak** – She said, she felt dizzy. “I feel dizzy.”

E. Writing Health Report

<p>NOTES 1</p> <p>Patient: 60-year-old man</p> <p>Admitted to hospital: 20 Nov 2017</p> <p>Presenting symptoms: Bad cough and nauseous, swollen ankles and feet, numb fingers, dizzy, fell over and lost consciousness</p> <p>Diagnosis: Died of heart failure</p> <p>Treatment: -</p> <p>Follow-up: -</p>	<p>REPORT</p> <p>The victim was a 60-year-old man. Two days ago he complained of a bad cough and said he felt nauseous. Yesterday his ankles and feet were swollen and he told his wife that his fingers were numb. At two o'clock in the afternoon he felt dizzy, fell over and lost consciousness. He died of heart failure in the ambulance.</p>
<p>Patient Narrative</p> <p>I was feeling well until a few months ago. In the beginning, I just felt off-color and a bit tired. But lately, I've been feeling completely worn out at the end of the day. I'm not eating any more than usual but I've put on 9 kilos in the last year. My stool is hard and my hair has started to fall out.</p>	<p>REPORT</p> <p>A 50-year old housewife, who had been well until four months ago, (1) _____ of tiredness (2) _____. She had (3) _____ 9kg in weight in the year before she (4) _____ to her GP although she denied eating more than usual. She was (5) _____ and she noticed her hair had started to fall out.</p>
<p>NOTES 2</p> <p>Patient: 55-year-old woman</p> <p>Admitted to hospital: Monday 13th June, 18.35</p> <p>Presenting symptoms: burning pain in the center of chest, nausea, numbness in fingers</p> <p>Diagnosis: angina attack</p> <p>Treatment: rest & glyceryl trinitrate</p> <p>Follow-up: Tuesday 11.00 : No symptoms, vital signs normal 14.00: Discharged</p>	<p>REPORT</p>

F. Kinds of Pain

It is vital for doctors to understand exactly what kind of pain the patient experiences. There are a large number of words describing pain in English and this unit tries to introduce most of them.

<p><u>HEAD</u></p> <p>Do you have a/an ... headache?</p> <p>splitting / throbbing / band-like / dull / aching / burning / sharp / stabbing / colicky / blinding / stress-induced / tension</p> <p>Do you have a migraine?</p>	<p><u>TOOTH</u></p> <p>Do you have (a) ... toothache? /</p> <p>Is your toothache ...?</p> <p>sharp / dull / throbbing / stabbing / pulsating</p> <p>Is your tooth ...?</p> <p>sensitive / aching / tender / cramping</p>	<p><u>LOWER BACK</u></p> <p>Is the pain in your back ...?</p> <p>low in onset / long in duration / dull / diffused / aching / steady / constant / severe / progressing poorly / localized / crushing / deep / mild</p>
<p><u>KIDNEYS AND URINARY TRACT</u></p> <p>Do you have (a) ... pain / ache / discomfort?</p> <p>sharp / dull / severe / burning / stinging / nagging / niggling / splitting / flank / back / abdominal / steady / low grade</p> <p>Do you have slight discomfort?</p>	<p><u>ABDOMEN</u></p> <p>Do you feel any / a ... pain in your abdomen?</p> <p>sharp / dull / aching / gnawing / burning / cramping / colicky / diffused / localized / recurrent / constant / flank / intermittent / stabbing</p> <p>Do you get / feel bloated?</p> <p>Do you have any heartburn / indigestion?</p>	<p><u>EXTREMITIES</u></p> <p>Do you have a/an ... pain in your shoulder / hand / foot?</p> <p>sharp / tingling / shooting / dull / burning / severe / pulsating / throbbing / weakness / numbness / tension</p> <p>Do you have ... in your hands/arms?</p> <p>Do you have cramp?</p> <p>Do you have an ache in your hand?</p>
<p><u>CHEST</u></p> <p>Is the pain in your chest ...?</p> <p>Do you have a ... pain in your chest?</p> <p>burning / constricting / bursting / choking / squeezing / gripping / pressing / crushing / sticking / jabbing / sharp / sensitive / knife-like / fleeting / throbbing / dull / severe / stabbing</p> <p>Is the pain in your chest ...?</p> <p>like a weight on it / like a band across it</p>		

References:

- An English as a Second Language Health and Wellness Curriculum (2006).
- Check You English Vocabulary for Medicine (2006).
- English for Doctors (2006).
- Oxford English for Careers, Nursing (2011).
- Professional English in Use, Medicine (2007).
- <https://www.braingle.com/brainteasers/31323/backfired-pranks.html>

Homework due in class next week

Student ID: _____ Name: _____ Section _____ No. _____

The naughty four girls once decided to play some practical pranks on four different innocent guys. They learnt 4 different magic spells from the book "Spells for Dummies". Unfortunately, their magic backfired and instead of the intended victims, the girls themselves suffered from 4 different problems.

With the help of these clues, can you figure out which girl chose which guy as her victim, which spell she threw on him, and what problem did she face as a result of spell backfire.

1. The high fever spell gave pimples to the thrower.
2. The spell intended to make Joe lose appetite, made the thrower obese.
3. It looked like Cathy has spent many long hours in the toilet after her spell on Henry backfired.
4. The worst sufferer was Frank's torturer, as she remained unconscious for hours after her spell backfired.
5. The vomiting spell was not intended for Henry.
6. Rose was forced to order a new wardrobe for herself, as her existing clothes became useless after her spell backfired.
7. Eve could not show her face to anyone for weeks.

Girls	Guys				Spell				Backfire Affect			
	Joe	Henry	Frank	Ethan	Vomiting	Fever	Anorexia	Bloating	Obesity	Diarrhea	Fainting	Pimples
Eve												
Rose												
Lily												
Cathy												

Draw what happen to those people

Eve	Cathy	Lily	Rose
Joe	Henry	Frank	Ethan