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| **EL Civics: Health Care (Obj 28) • IH5/ADV6**  **Task 3: Communicating With Your Doctor** |
| **Language & Literacy Objectives:**  2. Develop a list of questions to ask community health care providers.  4. Describe symptoms of an illness. |
| **INTRODUCTION** |
| In this lesson, students will learn how to describe symptoms they are having, and the length of time they have been experiencing those symptoms. They will also learn strategies for asking their doctor for help and/or advice. |
| **ASSESSMENT TASK – 12 points possible** |
| Request Health Assistance: Given an agency-created prompt of an illness, student will write a draft of an email to the student’s doctor. Student will (1) describe the symptoms, (2) describe the duration of the illness, and (3) request assistance from the doctor. |
| **SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES** |
| * Students work together in pairs of groups to come up with lists of questions to ask healthcare providers, and questions to expect from healthcare providers * Use PowerPoint presentation on “Describing Symptoms” to jumpstart class discussion * Role plays between patients and doctors, patients and nurses; calling a doctor’s office to make an appointment * Compare and contrast writing email and writing a formal letter |

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| **HANDOUTS PROVIDED** |
| 1. Related Vocabulary 2. Discussion Questions 3. Describing Symptoms (Teacher’s Notes, plus 5 student handouts) 4. Introduction: Talking With Your Doctor 5. Communicating With Your Doctor Through Email 6. Writing Effective Email Messages 7. Examples: Email Messages to Doctors 8. Practice: Emailing Your Doctor |
| **COMPUTER LAB IDEAS** |
| * Students type up lists of real questions for healthcare provider * Student sends actual email (for an authentic purpose) to healthcare provider; optional: bring in copy of email and/or response from doctor, to share with classmates * Listening practice – [Doctor’s Visit](https://www.esl-lab.com/vocabulary-lessons/doctors-office/) (Randall’s ESL Cyber Listening Lab) * Prepare students with the type of information they need to bring to a doctor’s visit, and the types of questions they should be prepared to answer: [Questions You Doctor Will Ask During a Primary Care Visit](https://www.horizonhealthcare.org/questions-your-doctor-will-ask-during-a-primary-care-visit/) * Videos on YouTube:   [Speaking With Patients, Medical Student Scenarios](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j54UvcDb7UU)   * Use [Picture Stories for Adult ESL Health Literacy](https://www.cal.org/caela/esl_resources/Health/healthindex.html) as starting points for class discussions about health-related topics. |

Task 3 – Handout #1

**Related Vocabulary**

*adapted from* [*Dictionary.com*](http://www.dictionary.com/) *&* [*Longman Dictionary Online*](http://www.ldoceonline.com/)

**appointment:** scheduled time to meet with your doctor or healthcare professional

**medical examination:** a set of medical tests in a clinic, doctor’s office or hospital

**symptom:** something wrong with your body or mind which shows that you have a particular illness

**ailment:** an illness that is mild or not very serious

**illness:** an unhealthy condition of the body or mind

**disease:** a particular kind of illness, especially one that can spread to another person, or that affects a particular part of the body

**acute:** when an illness or disease becomes serious very quickly

**chronic:** illness or disease that lasts for a long time and cannot be cured (e.g. asthma, arthritis)

**hypochondriac:** someone who always worries about their health and thinks they may be ill, even when they are really not ill

**pain:** the feeling you have when part of your body hurts

***dull:*** *not severe, but lasts for a long time*

***sharp:*** *short, but severe*

**ache:** continuous pain that is not sharp or very strong

**side effects:** an effect that a drug has on your body in addition to curing pain or illness (may be harmful)

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**Discussion Questions: Communicating With Your Doctor**

1. What is health care like in your country?
2. What do you think of health care in this country?
3. How can health care in the U.S. be improved?
4. When was the last time you were sick?
5. When was the last time you went to a doctor?
6. Have you visited a doctor since you arrived here? If so, describe the experience. Were you able to communicate with the doctor in English? Why or why not? Did you understand the doctor’s advice or instructions?
7. Who do you think is responsible for the care of your health—you or your doctor?
8. Have you ever disagreed with a doctor? If so, what did you do or say?
9. Have you ever changed doctors? Why?

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TASK 3 - Handout #3A

##### Describing Symptoms—Teacher’s Notes

*adapted from:* [*Hopelink Adult Education*](http://www.eastsideliteracy.org/tutorsupport/ESL/ESL_Symptoms.htm)

 

Using the **Describing Symptoms** handouts (#3B-3F), ask students the following questions:

*“What’s the matter?”*

*“Has this ever happened to you?”*

*“What did you do?”*

*“What other words do you know when you are not feeling well?”*

Project the sample conversation below or write it on the board. Students will practice the conversation in pairs. Use the pictures of symptoms to practice each one.

A: “What’s the matter?"

B: “I have a headache.”

A: “I’m sorry to hear that. I hope you feel better soon.”

B: “Thanks.”

For more practice, have students practice dialogues that might occur in the doctor’s office or emergency room, asking and answering questions such as:

*"Where does it hurt?"*

*"How long have you felt like this?"*

*"Are you taking any medication?"*

*"What kind of medical insurance do you have?"*

With more advanced students, have students practice writing down the symptoms and/or questions in a letter to take to the doctors’ office. Explain that this will help them to remember everything important and to be better understood.

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TASK 3 - Handout #3B

##### Describing Symptoms—Student Handout 1

##### *adapted from:* [*bogglesworldesl.com*](https://bogglesworldesl.com/)

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| A cartoon of a person and a bee | A cartoon of a person with mosquitos | A cartoon of a person with a sunburn |
| A cartoon of a person with alergies | A cartoon of a person with a black eye | A close-up of a human eye with pink eye |

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TASK 3 - Handout #3C

##### Describing Symptoms—Student Handout 2

##### *adapted from:* [*bogglesworldesl.com*](https://bogglesworldesl.com/)

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| A foot with a bandaged twisted ankle | A cartoon of a person with a foot blister | A cartoon of a person who stubbed his toe |
| A cartoon of a person lying on the ground with a bump on his head | A cartoon of a person who is dizzy | A person touching with a headache |

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TASK 3 - Handout #3D

##### Describing Symptoms—Student Handout 3

##### *adapted from:* [*bogglesworldesl.com*](https://bogglesworldesl.com/)

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| A cartoon of a leg with a cast | A cartoon of a child with a cut leg | A cartoon of a person with a dog bite |
| a cartoon of a broken nose | A person with a nose bleed | A person with a runny nose |

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TASK 3 - Handout #3E

##### Describing Symptoms—Student Handout 4

##### *adapted from:* [*bogglesworldesl.com*](https://bogglesworldesl.com/)

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| A cartoon of a person with a burn | A cartoon of a person with itchy skin | A cartoon of a person with rashes |
| A cartoon of a person running with a stomach cramp | A cartoon of a person with stomach pain | A cartoon of a person vomiting |

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TASK 3 - Handout #3F

##### Describing Symptoms—Student Handout 5

##### *adapted from:* [*bogglesworldesl.com*](https://bogglesworldesl.com/)

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| A person helping someone who is choking | A cartoon of a child who is coughing | A close-up of a person's sore throat |
| A cartoon of a person with chills | Cartoon of a person with a thermometer in his mouth with fever | Cartoon a cartoon of a person with the flu |

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TASK 3 - Handout #4

##### Introduction: Talking With Your Doctor *adapted from* [*National Institutes of Health*](https://www.nih.gov/institutes-nih/nih-office-director/office-communications-public-liaison/clear-communication/talking-your-doctor)

How well you and your doctor talk to each other is one of the most important parts of getting good health care. Unfortunately, talking to your doctor isn’t always easy. It takes time and effort on your part as well as your doctor’s.

In the past, the doctor typically took the lead and the patient followed. Today, a good patient-doctor relationship is more of a partnership. You and your doctor can work as a team, along with nurses, physician assistants, pharmacists, and other health care providers, to solve your medical problems and keep you healthy.

This means asking questions if the doctor’s explanations or instructions are unclear, bringing up problems even if the doctor doesn’t ask, and letting the doctor know if you have concerns about a particular treatment or change in your daily life. Taking an active role in your health care puts the responsibility on both you and your doctor.

All of this is true for anyone, but when you’re communicating in another language, it becomes even more important to provide information, ask questions, and make sure you and your doctor truly understand each other.

**When talking with your doctor …**

**Be honest** — It is tempting to say what you think the doctor wants to hear: for example, that you smoke less or eat a more balanced diet than you really do. While this is natural, it’s not in your best interest. Your doctor can suggest the best treatment only if you say what is really going on. For instance, you might say: *“I have been trying to quit smoking, as you recommended, but I am not having much success.”*

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**Decide what questions are most important** — Make a list of your questions or concerns in order of importance and give it to the doctor at the beginning of your appointment.

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**Stick to the point** — Remember that each patient is given a limited amount of time. To make the best use of your time, stay focused. For instance, give the doctor a brief description of the symptom, when it started, how often it happens, and if it is getting worse or better.

**Share your point of view about the visit** — Tell the doctor if you feel rushed, worried, or uncomfortable. Try to voice your feelings in a positive way. For example, you could say something like: *“I know you have many patients to see, but I’m really worried about this. I’d feel much better if we could talk about it a little more. I could come back for another visit.”*

Remember, even the best doctor may not be able to answer all your questions. In that case, they can help you find the information you need or refer you to a specialist. If a doctor regularly brushes off your questions or symptoms, or tries to convince you they are “in your head,” look for another doctor.

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Task 3 – Handout #5

**Communicating With Your Doctor Through Email**

**When is it appropriate to email your doctor?**

Email is a good way to communicate with your doctor when you don’t need an instant response (most replies typically expected within 48 hours). Many doctors prefer to use email with their patients for routine inquiries between appointments, such as:

* lab reports and test results
* updates on medication and treatment
* follow-up questions after a checkup
* prescription refills
* referrals to specialists

Many healthcare providers offer private, internal email systems which automatically update patients’ medical records. Email also gives patients an opportunity to talk about sensitive or embarrassing things they wouldn’t normally bring up in person.

**When is it better to call on the phone or visit in person?**

When you have and emergency or acute health problem requiring immediate attention (e.g. sudden, sharp chest pain), you should call or visit. Also, many doctors prefer to see you in person if you have a new medical problem that hasn’t been treated before.

**Tips for emailing your doctor:**

* Include your real name (full name), patient’s name and ID number, and a contact phone number.
* Be specific and focused.
* If you need a response within 48 hours, call instead.

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##### Writing Effective Email Messages

##### *adapted from* [*Wheaton College*](https://www.wheaton.edu/academics/services/writing-center/writing-resources/style-diction-tone-and-voice/) *and* [*Michigan State University*](https://ombud.msu.edu/resources-self-help/for-graduate-students/writing-effective-letter-or-email) *writing resources*

When writing an email message, you need to consider the following:

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| **Format**: rules for greetings, closings & punctuation | *Rules for email are less formal than letters. Often, greetings and closings are not necessary.* |
| **Tone**: feeling of the message (professional? angry? friendly?) | Send me information.  Could you please send me information?  I would appreciate it if you could send me information.  Thanks!  Thank you for your help. |
| **Level of Formality**: related to tone; depends on your relationship with the reader | Let me know, OK?  I would appreciate it if you could let me know what you think. |
| **Functional Language**: requests, suggestions, apologies, complaints | *When communicating with your doctor, you will most likely write requests.* |

**Writing a Routine Request to Your Doctor**

A routine request is when you are not asking for a special favor, and you expect the request to be fulfilled.

* State your main idea in the first or second sentence. This will save your reader (the doctor) time. Include any necessary information the doctor will need to fulfill your request (e.g. name and current strength of medication).
* Use polite, but not flowery, language.
* Be specific. State exactly what you want.
* Close with a friendly tone in your last paragraph.

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**Examples: Email Requests to Doctors**

From: Julie Brown  
Date Sent: January 2, 2019

To: Dr. Bob Jones, Kaiser Permanente

Subject: Shortness of Breath

Hi Dr. Jones,

Hope you are doing well.

I’m writing because I have been having some shortness of breath for the past two weeks. It happens when I am sitting and when I am up moving around.  It comes and goes--I will have it for a few days, then it goes away, and then comes on spontaneously.  I do not have any chest pain or pain when I take a deep breath, but it feels like I cannot get enough air in. I’m a non-smoker and live in a smoke-free home.

I would appreciate your advice about how to improve my breathing.

Thank you,

Julie Brown

Patient #650893

310-972-5543

From: Hideko Sato  
Date Sent: January 8, 2019

To: Dr. Sally Johnson

Subject: Change in Medication Strength

Dear Dr. Johnson,

How are you? I’m writing because I think my medication needs to be adjusted. As you prescribed at my last visit three months ago, I have been taking 75mcg of Levothroid for my thyroid problem. However, I am still feeling very sluggish. Could you please increase my dosage to 100mcg?

I look forward to hearing back from you.

Thanks,

Hideko Sato

Medical Record #: 008124849

562-555-4491

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**Practice: Emailing Your Doctor**

***Directions****: Choose* ***one*** *of the scenarios below. Use the info provided to write an email to your doctor. Describe the symptoms & duration of your illness, and request the doctor’s help.*

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| ❑ **Scenario 1:**  Three days ago, you started having some shortness of breath. You don’t have any chest pain or jaw pain, but when you take a deep breath, you cannot get enough air in. You don’t smoke, nor are you around anyone who does smoke. Ask Dr. Jones (not an office staff member) to call you personally to discuss with her. | ❑ **Scenario 2:**  For the past two months, you have been taking Zoloft for depression. You feel better, but you are very tired most of the time and have trouble concentrating at work. You want to talk with your doctor about adjusting your dosage or changing your medication. Ask Dr. Smith to respond via email with her advice. | ❑ **Scenario 3:**  You have had a cough and sore throat for more than one week. The cough is very dry and it’s keeping you awake at night. It doesn’t seem to be going away, and you are worried you might have strep throat. Ask Dr. Madison if he wants you to come in for a checkup. |

From: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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To: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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