

# Attending an outpatient clinic

## LEARNING OUTCOMES



- To discuss a health condition with a health professional
- To find out key information about a health condition by asking questions

## RESOURCES

- Copies of Resources 1–2
- Audio equipment 51–52

## RELATED THEMES

Discussing a health concern (pages 251–262)  
 Asking questions (pages 233–241)

### HEALTH SKILLS

Treatment and care of people with long-term health conditions such as diabetes mellitus, arthritis or asthma makes major demands on the NHS. Much of the care of conditions such as these takes place in outpatient clinics; these clinics may be held at a hospital but increasingly now are held at GP practices or clinics in the community.

Patients who are well informed about their condition may be able to manage it better through self-care. Becoming an ‘expert patient’ is empowering for people with long-term conditions. According to some research, people who have trained in self-management tend to be more confident and less anxious. They make fewer visits to the doctor, can communicate better with health professionals, take less time off work, and are less likely to suffer acute episodes requiring hospitalisation. Better self-management may also relieve some of the pressure on the NHS.

This theme helps learners to communicate with health professionals and ask questions for further information about their condition.

#### Related health information

Expert patients  
[www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk/en.aspx?articleID=404](http://www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk/en.aspx?articleID=404)

### SKILLS FOR LIFE

In order to find out essential information about a health condition and to enable self-care, learners need to be able to:

- ask questions of doctors and other health professionals about their health
- listen to their replies and extract key information.

#### Core curriculum

Activities in this theme will contribute to learning in the following curriculum areas:

- ask questions to obtain information (E Sc/E3.3b)
- listen for and identify relevant information (E Lr/E3.3b).

- Display a list of long-term health conditions, such as diabetes, angina, asthma, HIV / AIDS, hay fever, psoriasis, depression.
- Read the names aloud or encourage learners to read them. Remind learners that words for health conditions are sometimes long or have unusual spellings.
- Take suggestions about what the conditions are and what learners know about them.
- Ask learners to suggest other long-term health conditions they have experienced or that someone they know has experienced. Display the names and ask learners to recount their knowledge or experience of the conditions.
- Divide learners into small groups. Ask each group to choose the condition they know most about and to share ideas about:
  - what a patient would need to know about it
  - how to find information
  - why it can be difficult to ask questions at a hospital clinic.
- Ask learners to report back to the whole group, and display a list of key points.

*What do you know about these health conditions?*

*What experience do you have of attending a hospital clinic?*

*What can you do to prepare for an appointment at a hospital clinic?*

#### ACTIVITY 1 51

#### Ask different questions to get different kinds of information

- Give out Resource 1. Ask learners to identify Ryan's condition from the words and picture.
- Ask learners to suggest some questions that the mother of a child with asthma might ask a doctor.
- Play the audio clip of Ryan's mother's questions.
- Ask learners to follow the questions on Resource 1, then match each question to one of the types of information listed.
- Replay the questions for learners to listen and practise intonation ('What causes asthma?' – voice goes down at the end; 'Will it get better?' – voice goes up at the end).

#### Support

- Play the questions one at a time and ensure understanding.
- Provide some possible answers, such as 'Many things can cause asthma ...' 'Diet doesn't usually affect asthma but you should make sure you keep Ryan's room free from dust.'
- Ask learners to match each question to the type of information it is asking for.

#### ESOL

- Support learners in forming questions. Give examples of statements and questions and show how the word order changes.
  - **Group 1: It is dangerous – Is it dangerous? You should** change his diet – **Should I** change his diet?
  - **Group 2** with 'do' and 'does': **You need** to take more exercise. – **Do I need to** take more exercise? **Drinking makes** the condition worse. – **Does drinking make** the condition worse?
- Review question words ('what', 'why', etc.). Remove the question words from some questions and discuss the missing question word (e.g. .... treatment is best for asthma?).

#### TIP

Reassure learners that it is all right to ask questions if they don't understand the first time.

## ACTIVITY 2 52

### Practise asking different questions about a health condition

- Play the audio clip about Wilfred, who has arthritis. Make sure learners understand the word 'arthritis'.
- Ask learners to listen and note down each question that Wilfred asks, and then to identify the kind of information asked for.
- Encourage learners to practise saying the questions aloud, concentrating on intonation.
- Ask learners to make up and practise further questions about a condition they are interested in, opening with the constructions 'Should I ... ?' 'Does ... ?' 'What ... ?' 'How ... ?'.
- Ask learners to practise these and other questions in paired question-and-answer sessions.

#### Support

- Play the whole conversation through once for gist, then replay, pausing after each question for learners to listen and copy the pronunciation.
- Discuss each question individually and agree the kind of information requested.

#### ESOL

- Provide more questions to practise correct intonation. Review how the voice goes up at the end of the question in 'yes / no' questions and down in questions that start with a question word.
- Encourage learners to imitate the way your voice goes up and down when repeating the questions.

*What do you know about arthritis?*

*Why is it important to ask questions about what you can do to help your condition?*

#### TIP

The emphasis should be on recording questions so that learners can read them back later, not on correct spelling.

## ACTIVITY 3 51

### Role-play a discussion with a hospital professional

- Talk about the different kinds of answer you would expect from different kinds of question. For example, questions starting with 'Did I ... ?' 'Will you ... ?' will elicit yes / no answers; questions starting with question words such as 'What ... ?' 'How ... ?' should yield more open answers.
- Replay the audio clip of Ryan's mother's questions one question at a time. Discuss what kind of answers they think the doctor will give (i.e. whether the answer will start with 'yes' or 'no' or with new information).
- Divide learners into pairs. Set up a role-play, using Resource 2A and B.
- Review the role-play and display a list of questions used. Talk about the possible replies from the health professional.

#### TIPS

- Give learners time to plan and practise what they will say or do.
- In review, collect examples of questions used by learners, discuss their effectiveness and build up a list.

### Support

- Display some similar questions a person with hay fever might ask. Ensure you have a mix of questions which can be answered with 'yes' or 'no' (e.g. 'Will it get better with time?') and questions that require fuller answers (e.g. 'What causes hay fever?'). Discuss the type of answers learners would expect for each question. Ask for a volunteer to ask you the questions. Encourage learners to listen carefully to your answers (e.g. 'Was the answer "yes" or "no"?', 'What information did you hear?').
- As preparation for the role-play, model the role-play with a volunteer taking the patient role.

### ESOL

As follow-up, discuss useful ways of seeking clarification at this point or asking the doctor to slow down, such as 'I didn't understand that.' 'Could you repeat that, please?' 'Sorry, did you say ... ?' 'Could you speak a bit more slowly, please?'

### Action

- Ask learners to draw up a range of questions about a condition that interests them and, if possible, put the questions to a professional in the real world. Alternatively, invite a knowledgeable person to talk to the group about a particular condition. You could also prepare information and deliver it yourself.
- Encourage learners to ask questions.
- Review as a whole group.
- Encourage learners to make a collection of words and phrases for talking about a health condition they are interested in.
- Discuss different ways of recording the words and expressions to make them memorable and easy to access (e.g. in a vocabulary notebook, as a word map, by topic, etc.).
- Learners may like to write the translation in their language of choice or a simple definition in English. Encourage them to put new words and phrases into meaningful sentences.

*What health condition do you want to know more about?*

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RESOURCE 1

51



What causes asthma?

Is it a common problem?



## Types of information asked for:

- the cause of the condition
- the care
- general information
- what will happen in the future.

## Patient

Prepare four or five questions to ask at the hay fever clinic.

1 \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

2 \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

3 \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

4 \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

5 \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## Nurse

Here is some information about hay fever to help you answer the patient's questions.

- Hay fever is an allergy.
- Pollen from grasses can cause hay fever.
- Hay fever is very common.
- I can give you medication to help.
- You might find that wearing sunglasses helps. Try to stay indoors when the pollen count is high.
- Some people grow out of hay fever.

## ACTIVITY 1 / Resource 1

Why does Ryan get asthma? = the cause of the condition

Will he grow out of it? = what will happen in the future

What causes asthma? = the cause of the condition

Is it a common problem? = general information

Will it get better? = what will happen in the future

Is it dangerous? = general information

What should I do if Ryan has an attack? = the care

Should I change his diet? = the care

## ACTIVITY 2

Should I do more exercise? = care

What can I do to stop the pain? = care

How should I change my lifestyle? = care

## ACTIVITIES 1 & 3



Why does Ryan get asthma?

Will he grow out of it?

What causes asthma?

Is it a common problem?

Will it get better?

Is it dangerous?

What should I do if Ryan has an attack?

Should I change his diet?

## ACTIVITY 2



**Wilfred:** Should I do more exercise?

**Doctor:** Yes. Exercise is always good. It stops your joints getting stiff.

**Wilfred:** What can I do to stop the pain?

**Doctor:** I can give you some medicine to help the pain. But changes in your lifestyle will help too.

**Wilfred:** How should I change my lifestyle?

**Doctor:** You can think about what you eat for a start. I can give you a diet sheet.