

# Telling your doctor what's wrong

## LEARNING OUTCOMES

- To introduce a medical problem to the doctor, using appropriate vocabulary
- To respond to a doctor's questions
- To describe symptoms



## RESOURCES

- Copies of Resources 1–5
- Role-play cards prepared from Resource 5A
- Word cards prepared from Resource 3 (Activity 1 Support)
- Enlarged versions of Resource 2 (Activity 1 Support)
- Planning sheets to be devised by teacher ('Action' section)
- Audio equipment 50–51

## RELATED TOPICS

Talking to your doctor (Theme 10, Topic 6)

Answering your doctor's questions (Theme 10, Topic 7)

## HEALTH SKILLS

Having the skills and vocabulary to be able to describe symptoms in detail can be very helpful in the process of getting an accurate diagnosis. Equally as important is that the patient feels confident enough to be able to ask questions and ask for clarification from the doctor. The doctor also needs to be sure that s/he has explained or answered things clearly by checking that the patient knows what to do next.

## FUNCTIONAL SKILLS

In order to explain a medical problem to a doctor or other health professional, learners need to be able to:

- clearly state the names of key parts of the body
- use words and expressions to describe symptoms
- use suitable expressions to introduce problems and to indicate time-scales.

### Functional Skills/Core Curriculum

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

- speak clearly in a way which suits the situation **English** L1.3 (**E**Sc/L1.1a)
- give short explanations and descriptions **English** E3.2 (**E**Sc/E3.4f).

- Ask learners about their experience of explaining problems to the doctor or other health professional in their own language or in English.
- Draw out examples of useful words (names for parts of the body, describing words, verbs) and whole expressions (e.g. 'I'm worried about ...').
- Discuss the embarrassment of discussing body parts and functions in British culture, and draw out any similarities and differences in their own countries.
- Discuss ways of overcoming embarrassment at the doctor's, for example knowing the formal terms for 'private' parts of the body, writing the problem down and handing it to the doctor, using a diagram, asking to see a male or female doctor specifically.

*What can be difficult about explaining your problem to a doctor?*

### ACTIVITY 1

#### Use appropriate words for parts of the body

- Give out Resource 1 and talk about the kinds of health problem raised in each speech-bubble.
- Ask learners to find in the speech-bubbles words for parts of the body (e.g. 'wrist', 'eyes'); symptoms (e.g. 'vomiting', 'diarrhoea'); descriptive words (e.g. 'sore', 'itchy') and whole introductory phrases (e.g. 'I'm worried about ...', 'I've got a ...').
- Give out Resources 2 and 3. In pairs, ask learners to complete the labels on Resource 2, referring to the list of parts of the body on Resource 3. (Suggest that they write the words they know first, then the others.) Be sensitive to any embarrassment caused by the word 'genitals'. If necessary, reassure learners that this is a formal term used for both male and female parts.
- Encourage learners to add other names for parts of the body they might need to use when discussing their health with the doctor.

*Why do you need to describe parts of the body and symptoms clearly?*

*Can you think of alternative words for different parts of the body?*

#### Support

- Divide the words on Resource 3 into two lists: the easier, more familiar ones first, such as 'head', 'nose', 'eyes', then the more detailed ones such as 'shoulder' and 'throat'.
- Divide learners into small groups. Give out enlarged copies of the body diagrams from Resource 2 and sets of word cards made from Resource 3.
- Ask learners to label the diagrams with the cards.
- Give extra practice by asking learners to point to relevant parts of the body as you call them out.
- Suggest learners keep a page in their vocabulary notebooks to record useful words.

#### ESOL

- Some learners may need help to recognise different words for talking about parts of the body and symptoms, and to know when to use them.
- Discuss alternative words for the same parts of the body (e.g. 'abdomen'/'tummy'; 'bottom'/'backside'/'bum').
- Talk about when it would be appropriate to use each word.
- Do the same for symptoms (e.g. 'vomit'/'be sick'/'throw up'; 'feel ill'/'poorly'/'off colour').

## ACTIVITY 2 50

### Describe symptoms

- Play the audio clip of individual patients speaking to their doctor.
- Ask learners to listen for the details and complete the table on Resource 4.

#### Support

- Play each patient's words more than once and in short sections.
- Ask learners first to pick out and record each named body part.
- As a group, ask them to listen and pick out each patient's symptoms.

#### ESOL

- Learners will need help to develop their vocabulary for talking to the doctor about their symptoms.
- With learners, compile a list of useful words. For example, for pain: 'throbbing', 'dull ache', 'stabbing', 'severe', 'sore'; for skin: 'red', 'itchy'.
- Ask learners to list useful expressions, such as 'it hurts'/'it's hurting'; 'it aches'; 'I feel sick'; 'I've got a ...'.
- Introduce some expressions for more sensitive symptoms, such as 'I'm constipated'; 'I've got diarrhoea'; 'I'm itching'; 'I've got bad breath'.

What can be difficult about describing symptoms?

#### TIP

Find interesting ways to introduce new words. For example, for words for pain, mark out a line on the floor as a continuum, from slight to severe. Give out cards with words like **tingling, stabbing, tender, aching** and ask learners to place them at an appropriate place on the line.

## ACTIVITY 3 51

### Tell your doctor about a problem

- In pairs, ask learners to prepare for a role-play between a doctor and patient by choosing one of the scenarios on Resource 5A. If they are confident, they can use a health problem of their own choice.
- Give out Resource 5B for their planning.
- Give learners the table on Resource 5C to help them with words and expressions they can use to describe their own different problem.
- Play the audio clip of doctor-patient exchanges as a model. Discuss what the patients say, what the words mean and how they are pronounced.
- Ask learners to finish planning their role-play, using similar words and expressions as appropriate. They can then practise the role-play.
- Discuss the role-play: what went well, what could be improved. Suggest learners update their planning sheets.

Can you plan what to say to your doctor?

#### TIP

Circulate during the role-play and help learners to:

- use correct words for parts of the body
- describe symptoms effectively
- use stress appropriately when they speak.

#### Support

- Adapt the table on Resource 5C to include only simple describing words such as 'bad' and 'sore'.
- Work with learners as a whole group to read and understand the words and then to build up simple statements, such as 'My tongue is very sore'; 'I've got bad earache'.
- Progress to more advanced vocabulary if appropriate and ask learners to work out and check meanings.

#### ESOL

Before role-playing the situations, learners will benefit from practising the words and expressions they will need to act out the situations. Encourage them to practise saying some of the model expressions aloud before the role-play, concentrating on using correct stress ('I'm worried about my stomach').

## Action


- Allow learners time for reflection on what they have learnt about explaining symptoms to a doctor or other health professional. Encourage them to record one or two things they will do differently at their next appointment at their GP practice.
- Give out a preparation sheet like the one used for the role-play.
- Help learners to prepare notes for a visit to a health professional such as a dentist, an optician or physiotherapist as well as to a doctor.
- Ask them to make notes in preparation for explaining a problem or, if they wish, asking for preventative care, for example giving up smoking, losing weight, taking an HIV test, seeking advice about contraception.
- If appropriate, ask them to visit the health professional and report back on what went well and what difficulties they had.

### TIP

Respect learners' right to privacy in the report-back session. Allow them to give general feedback on the process without identifying the health service involved.

# Telling your doctor what's wrong

## RESOURCE 1



Doctor ...

I've been ill with vomiting and diarrhoea.

I think I've broken my wrist.

I'm worried about this mole on my thigh.

I've got a splitting headache.

My eyes are sore and itchy.

My daughter's head is bleeding badly.

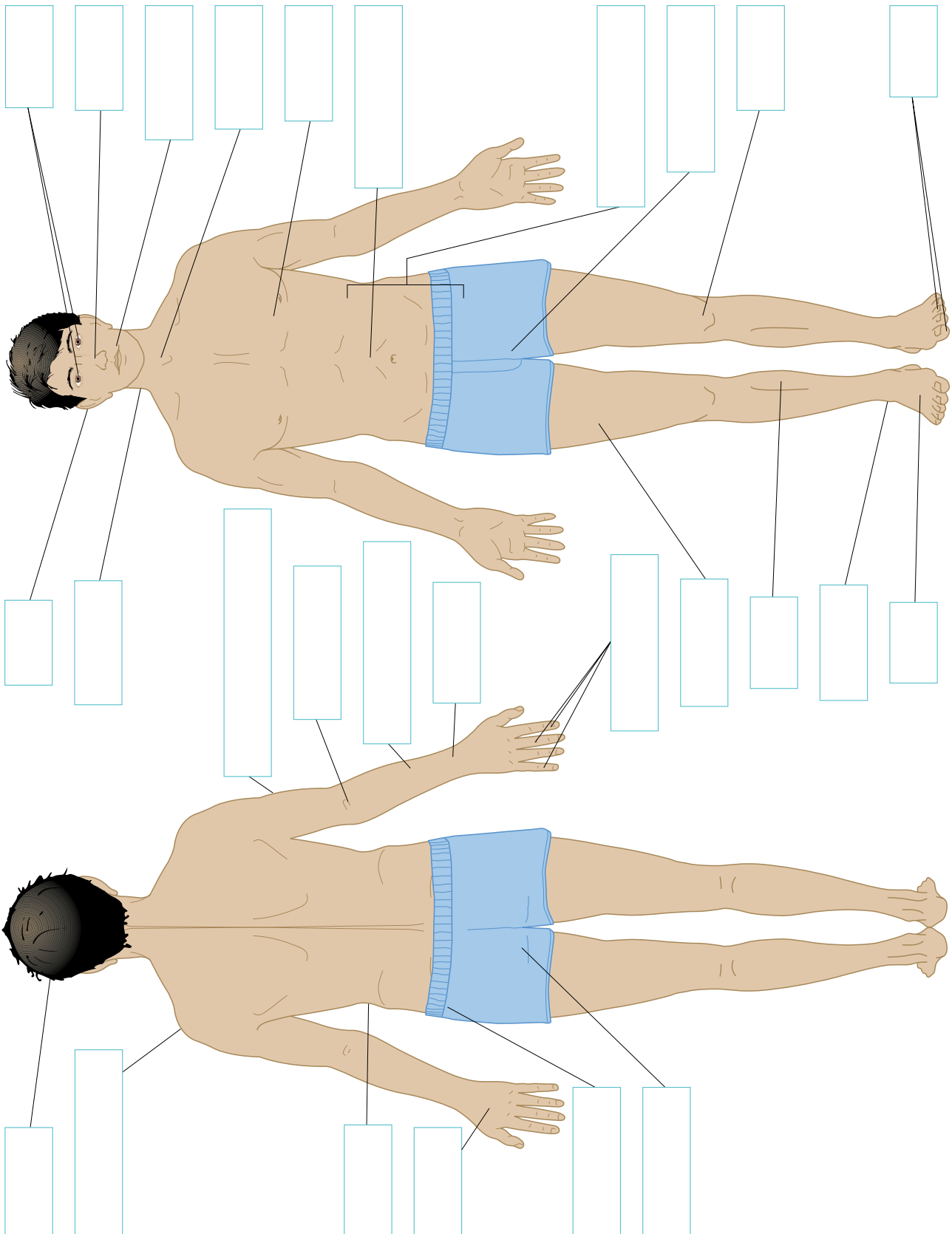
I've got a heavy cold and earache.

To explain a health problem to the doctor, you need:

- words for **symptoms** (e.g. **earache**)
- words for **body parts** (e.g. **thigh**)
- words to **describe** symptoms and body parts (e.g. **splitting**)
- whole **phrases** to introduce the problem (e.g. **I've been ill with ...**).

# Telling your doctor what's wrong

## RESOURCE 2



# Telling your doctor what's wrong

RESOURCE 3

head	neck	mouth
ear	eyes	chest
stomach	shoulder	abdomen
elbow	fingers	wrist
hip	thigh	waist
knee	hand	ankle
toes	genitals	bottom
nose	foot	forearm
upper arm	throat	calf

# Telling your doctor what's wrong

RESOURCE 4

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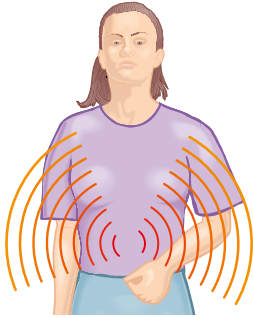
Patient number	Body part	Problem	Describing words	Since when?
1				
2				
3				
4				
5				
6				



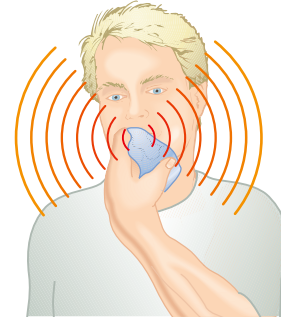
# Telling your doctor what's wrong

RESOURCE 5A

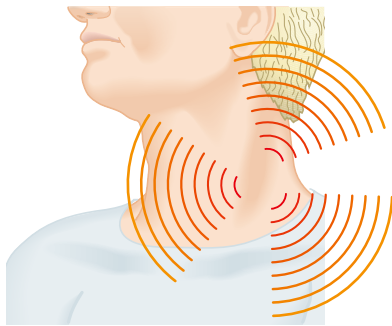
You have a stomach-ache.



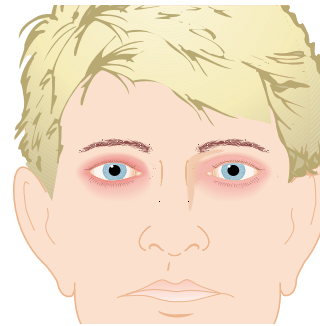
You have a cough.



You have a stiff neck.



You have sore eyes.



## Doctor

Hello. How are you today?

How can I help you?

What can I do for you?

How are you feeling?

When did this start?

When did this come on?

When did you first notice it?

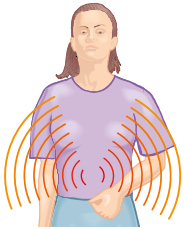

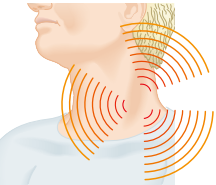
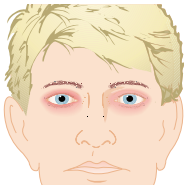
How does it feel?

# Telling your doctor what's wrong

RESOURCE 5B

## Patient

Use this to help you plan what to say.

Scenario	Describing words	Helpful expressions
<p>Stomach-ache</p> 		
<p>Cough</p> 		
<p>Stiff neck</p> 		
<p>Sore eyes</p> 		

Words to begin with:

- I'm worried about ...
- I've got ...
- My neck feels very ...
- I've got trouble with my ...

# Telling your doctor what's wrong

## RESOURCE 5C

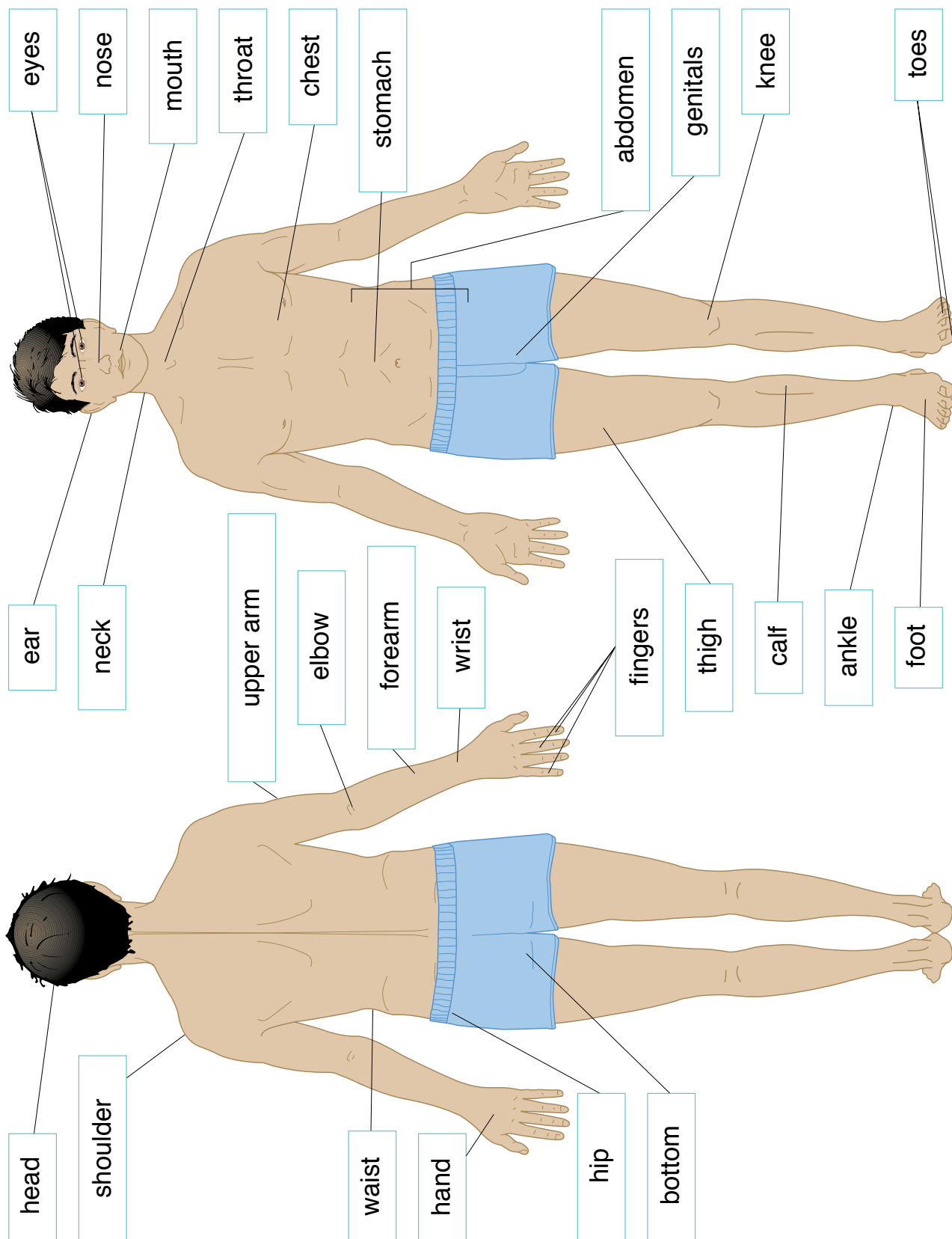
Part of the body	Problem	Describing words
ankle	it hurts	swollen black and blue sore painful
tongue	it's sore	sore red raw
ear	earache	painful throbbing bad terrible
skin	a rash	itchy spotty red bleeding
chest	hard to breathe	faint wheezy tired tight
stomach	stomach upset vomiting and diarrhoea	bad sick tired ill poorly

# Telling your doctor what's wrong

ANSWERS AND AUDIO SCRIPTS

ANSWERS

## ACTIVITY 1 / Resource 2



# Telling your doctor what's wrong

## ANSWERS AND AUDIO SCRIPTS

### ACTIVITY 2 / Resource 4

Patient number	Body part	Problem	Describing words	Since when?
1	lip	spot	painful	a week ago
2	throat	sore with high temperature	sore, high	this morning
3	stomach	vomiting, stomach ache; feels faint	faint	last night
4	leg	lump	big, hard	three weeks ago
5	head	headache and feeling sick and dizzy	sick, dizzy	yesterday
6	chest	pain	bad, throbbing	Monday

### AUDIO SCRIPTS

### ACTIVITY 2



- 1 I've got a spot on my lip. It came about a week ago. It's very painful.
- 2 I've got a sore throat and a high temperature. It started this morning and I just want to stay in bed.
- 3 I kept vomiting last night. Now my stomach aches and I feel very faint.
- 4 There's a lump at the top of my leg – here – and I'm worried about it. It's very big and hard. I found it three weeks ago.
- 5 My head hurts and I feel sick and dizzy. The headache started yesterday.
- 6 I'm worried about this pain in my chest. It's been very bad since Monday, really throbbing.

## ACTIVITY 3



**1 Doctor:** Hello. How are you today?

**Patient:** Well, I'm worried about my ankle. I hurt it at the gym last week and now it's really painful and swollen. And it's all black and blue.

**2 Doctor:** Hello. How can I help you?

**Patient:** My tongue feels very sore. I noticed it a few days ago but now it looks red and raw as well.

**3 Doctor:** Good morning. What can I do for you?

**Patient:** I've got a really bad earache. It was painful and throbbing all night so I couldn't sleep.

**4 Doctor:** Hello. How are you feeling today?

**Patient:** There's a red rash here on my skin. It's very itchy. I noticed a lot of little spots on Tuesday but I've scratched it and now it's bleeding as well.

**5 Doctor:** Not well today?

**Patient:** I've got trouble with my chest. It feels very tight when I try to breathe. I felt tired yesterday and today I'm very wheezy and I feel a bit faint.

**6 Doctor:** How are you this morning?

**Patient:** I've got a bad stomach upset with vomiting and diarrhoea. I began to feel ill late last night and I was sick several times during the night. I feel very tired and poorly.