

Discussing a health concern

LEARNING OUTCOMES

- To listen and extract key information about a health concern
- To listen and respond to a health professional who is giving advice
- To understand and follow advice from a health professional



RESOURCES

- Copies of Resources 1–3
- Video clips of people listening to health professionals, e.g. training videos or clips from TV hospital dramas ('Engage' activity and Activity 4 Support, optional)
- Leaflets about diabetes

- Internet or telephone access ('Action', optional)
- Audio equipment [🔊48–50](#)

RELATED THEMES

- Attending an outpatient clinic (pages 263–271)
- Asking questions (pages 233–241)

HEALTH SKILLS

Treatment and care of people with long-term health conditions makes major demands on the NHS. Patients who are well informed about their condition may be able to manage their condition better through self-care. This may also relieve some of the pressure on the NHS.

Research indicates that so-called 'expert' patients:

- feel confident and in control of their lives
- aim to manage their condition and its treatment in partnership with health professionals
- communicate effectively with professionals and are willing to share responsibility for treatment
- are realistic about the impact of their disease on themselves and their family
- use their skills and knowledge to lead full lives.

This theme helps learners listen and respond to health professionals as part of a dialogue about their medical condition.

SKILLS FOR LIFE

In order to gain essential information about an ongoing health concern and to enable self-care, learners need to be able to:

- listen and understand key information from health professionals
- clarify information when they are uncertain
- confirm their understanding.

Core curriculum

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

- listen for and identify relevant information ([ELr/E3.3b](#))
- use strategies to clarify and confirm understanding ([ELr/E3.4a](#)).

- Introduce the concept of long-term health conditions, such as diabetes, arthritis or mental illness. Ask learners to volunteer examples from their experience. Display the names of the conditions they mention.
- If available, play video clips of patients listening to health professionals and talk about the kinds of problems discussed. Note that TV medical dramas are generally well researched and can offer good opportunities for language development.

Does someone you know have a long-term medical condition?

What difficulties does the condition cause?

ACTIVITY 1 48

Explore different kinds of information about a health concern

- Discuss the pictures on Resource 1. Discuss what the pictures have in common (i.e. they all involve listening for information).
- Ask learners to find and circle the health condition being discussed in each picture. Encourage learners to share other information they know about these conditions.
- Play the audio clip of the speech-bubbles and discuss new words and expressions.
- Ask learners to match the scenarios in the pictures to the types of information given in the introduction on Resource 1.

What do you know about the health conditions discussed in these pictures?

How common are these conditions in the UK and in other countries you know?

Support

- Ask direct questions about each picture and speech-bubble: 'What is this person doing?' 'What is this person listening to / talking about?' 'What is this person saying about asthma (the health condition)?'
- Clarify new vocabulary as the questions and answers progress.
- Play the audio clip for each speech-bubble individually and clarify understanding.

ESOL

- Many ESOL learners will know the names of medical conditions that affect themselves or their families, but may need more support with understanding idiomatic and everyday expressions such as 'set off' [an asthma attack], 'have a bad heart', 'fatty food'. Be prepared to explain such expressions and give examples of how they are used.
- Provide some further examples of everyday expressions used about health conditions, such as 'feels run down', 'needs to cut down on fatty foods', 'when an asthma attack comes on'.

ACTIVITY 2 49

Listen for key information about a medical condition

- Play the audio clip of Esmé talking to the dietitian. Establish what is happening in the discussion.
- Give out Resource 2 and check that learners understand they are listening for key information.
- In pairs, ask learners to listen again and complete the answers together. They can then compare their findings with other pairs' in small groups.
- Replay the audio clip as necessary for learners to agree their final answers. Check and confirm answers as a whole group.
- Hand out leaflets about diabetes. Help learners to check what the leaflets say about diet and compare this with what they have heard.

What do you know about diabetes and its causes? How can you find out more?

Support

- Play the audio clip sentence by sentence.
- Ask questions to focus on key points, such as 'Who is Esmé talking to?' 'How does her skin feel?'
- Invite learners to talk about what kind of information they expect from a dietitian.
- Complete the answers together, displaying an enlarged version of Resource 2 and working together on the answers.
- Help learners to identify the key words to listen for.

ESOL

- Concentrate on vocabulary. Work with learners to compile a list of words and expressions associated with food and diet, such as 'cut out', 'give up', 'eat plenty of', 'limit', 'avoid', 'regular meals'. Encourage them to record these in their personal vocabulary notebooks, together with example sentences to show how they are used.

TIP

For activities that involve listening and noting information, suggest that learners first complete the answers in pencil so that they can make changes more easily when they listen again.

ACTIVITY 3 49–50

Demonstrate good listening skills

- Discuss the importance of careful listening.
- Replay the audio clip and ask learners what Esmé does to show she is listening, such as asking questions, repeating information (e.g. 'So you want me to ...'), etc.
- Take suggestions about other ways of listening and showing understanding, such as with gestures and body language (e.g. nodding, keeping eye contact, sitting forwards, appropriate facial expressions).
- Play the audio clip of the dietitian talking to another patient.
- Ask learners to indicate (by a show of hands) points where the patient could or should respond. Stop the audio clip at these points to discuss and agree what they might say.
- Set up groups of three for a role-play (dietician, patient and observer) about a patient who wants to lose some weight. Resources 3A–C provide a script for the dietitian and other support material for the role-play. Check that the person playing the patient is happy to play someone with a weight problem.
- Give time for learners to plan and practise what they will do or say. The person playing the patient may find it useful to note down four or five statements they want to make or questions to ask about how to lose weight.
- Ask the observer to tick points on the checklist as they hear them and note down points to report back.
- Review at the end, picking out what the observers thought went well and less well in the role-play.

How important is it to listen carefully to health professionals?

What gestures and body language tell that you someone is really listening to you?

Are these gestures the same or different in other cultures you know?

Support

- Replay the video clips of patients listening to health professionals.
- Focus on the body language and interjections and help learners to prepare and note down any questions that are used for clarification or repetition ('Do you mean I must eat ...?' 'So, I need to eat ...').
- Set up a role-play in which one volunteer plays the patient while you take the part of the dietitian.
- After discussion, move on to the small-group role-play.

ESOL

- For learners who are not confident about asking for clarification and those who come from cultures where questioning and querying 'experts' may be less acceptable, provide extra practice in using expressions such as 'I didn't understand that.' 'Can you explain again?'
- Discuss and practise facial gestures. Remind learners that a smile confirms that you understand and are happy, whereas if you frown or look enquiring, the health professional may stop and ask if you understand.

TIP

Reassure learners that it is fine to ask questions or to say that they are unhappy about an aspect of a care plan.

Action

- Allow learners time to reflect on what they have learnt about discussing a health concern.
- Select another medical condition that interests learners, such as mental illness or Crohn's disease.
- Invite a speaker to the class (you could also prepare and deliver a talk yourself or invite confident learners to do so), obtain a recording of a radio or TV programme about the condition, or ask learners to contact NHS Direct (by phone or Internet) or a specific helpline for advice.
- Beforehand, prepare a note sheet with learners so that they can record key words under categories like 'symptoms' and 'what to do'.
- Encourage learners to respond to the speaker by asking questions and repeating information and, if face to face, through body language.
- Review as a whole group.

How can you show you are actively listening?

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RESOURCE 1

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You can find out all types of information about a long-term health condition by listening. You may want to know:

- how to change your lifestyle
- more about the symptoms
- more about the causes
- general information about the condition.

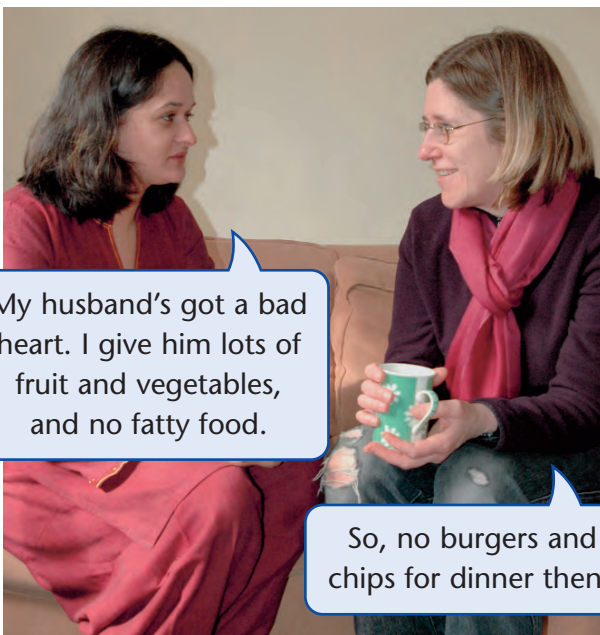
1



2



3



4



Discussing a health concern

RESOURCE 2

49

Name of condition



Symptoms

- 1 _____
- 2 _____
- 3 _____
- 4 _____



The dietitian tells Esmé that she must eat less ...

- 1 _____
- 2 _____



The dietitian tells Esmé that she must ...

- 1 _____
- 2 _____

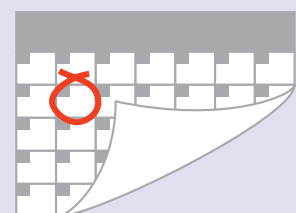


What tests will Esmé have at each meeting with the dietitian?

- 1 _____
- 2 _____
- 3 _____



How often will Esmé see the dietitian at first?



The dietitian

Use these ideas to help you.

- You've come to see me because you want to lose some weight. Is that right?
- Tell me what meals you eat each day.
- Do you eat snacks?
- First, you may need to eat less fat, so that means less fried food. You also need to cut down the amount of butter and cheese. Buy semi-skimmed rather than full-fat milk.
- It's important to eat plenty of fruit and vegetables. That will give you fibre, and important vitamins and minerals. We recommend that you eat at least five portions of fruit and vegetables every day. This leaflet tells you more about it and gives lots of useful ideas and information.
- Do you understand?
- Good. Now, it's really important that you eat regular meals.
- Start the day with a good breakfast – cereals, fresh fruit or fruit juice, a slice of wholemeal bread or toast ... anything on the diet sheet. By eating a good breakfast, you shouldn't get hungry before lunchtime so hopefully you won't want any snacks.
- If you do get hungry, try to avoid biscuits or chocolate, which have a lot of sugar in them. Fresh or dried fruit is much better for you.
- It's also important to cut down your alcohol intake, as alcohol contains a lot of calories.



Observer checklist

Tick the things that the patient does.

- Nods
- Looks interested
- Looks at the dietitian
- Asks questions
- Repeats information
- Says 'yes' or 'no'
- Makes interested sounds

Does the patient seem to understand the dietitian?

Yes/no

Notes

The patient

Plan what you will say here.

1 _____

2 _____

3 _____

4 _____

5 _____

ACTIVITY 1 / Resource 1

The following words should be circled:

- 1 diabetes
- 2 asthma
- 3 bad heart
- 4 depression

Information types

Picture 1 (With diabetes ...) = symptoms

Picture 2 (Cigarette smoke ...) = causes

Picture 3 (My husband's got a bad heart ...) = how to change your lifestyle

Picture 4 (New mothers ...) = general information

ACTIVITY 2 / Resource 2

Name of condition

diabetes

Symptoms

- 1 tired
- 2 hungry
- 3 thirsty
- 4 itchy skin

The dietitian tells Esmé that she must eat less ...

- 1 sugar
- 2 fat

The dietitian tells Esmé that she must ...

- 1 lose some weight
- 2 take some exercise

What tests will Esmé have at each meeting with the dietitian?

- 1 weight
- 2 blood
- 3 urine

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ANSWERS AND AUDIO SCRIPTS

How often will Esmé see the dietitian at first?

every 4 weeks

AUDIO SCRIPTS

ACTIVITY 1



- 1 With diabetes you may feel thirsty a lot of the time.
- 2 Cigarette smoke or house dust can set off an asthma attack.
- 3 **Woman 1:** My husband's got a bad heart. I give him lots of fruit and vegetables, and no fatty food.
Woman 2: So, no burgers and chips for dinner then?
- 4 New mothers sometimes get depression.

ACTIVITY 2



Dietitian: Good morning, Esmé. How are you today?

Esmé: Well, I still don't feel well. I'm very tired. I feel hungry and thirsty all the time and – I don't know if this is important – my skin feels sort of itchy. Is it my diabetes?

Dietitian: Itchy skin is one of the symptoms of diabetes, I'm afraid. But it should get better once we have your blood sugar level under control.

Esmé: How do we do that?

Dietitian: Well, you need to cut down on sugar for a start. And fat. Today I want us to talk about what you should eat and drink. Then together we're going to work out a healthy eating plan for you. I want you to stick to the plan for the next four weeks and then come back and see me.

Esmé: So you want me to follow the plan for four weeks. Will that make me feel better?

Dietitian: Well, it might take a while, I'm afraid, and you'll always have to be careful about what you eat, but you will feel better soon. I'll be here to help you. I'll see you every four weeks at first ...

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ANSWERS AND AUDIO SCRIPTS

Esmé: Every four weeks?

Dietitian: Yes, every four weeks I'll weigh you and test your blood and urine to see how things are. It's important for you to eat less sugar and fat, and to lose some weight.

Esmé: So, no sugar in my tea and no chips!

Dietitian: No, I'm afraid not.

Esmé: Oh ... diabetes is awful.

Dietitian: It isn't nice, no. But if you keep to your healthy eating plan and take some exercise you'll start to feel much better.

ACTIVITY 3



Dietitian: So, we've talked about what you normally eat each day. Now we need to work out a healthy eating plan for you. You said you want to lose some weight and we've agreed that first you need to eat less fat. So, that means less fried food. It's important that you eat plenty of fruit and vegetables so that you get fibre and vitamins and minerals. You need to eat five portions a day, at least. Do you understand?

Patient: Mm ...

Dietitian: Good. It's important to eat regular meals. Try to sit down for each meal. Don't go to the fridge for a snack whenever you want to – that way you'll eat too much. Start the day with a good breakfast – cereals, fresh fruit or fruit juice, a slice of wholemeal bread or toast – anything on the diet sheet. A good breakfast will stop you wanting snacks during the morning. Oh, and make sure you eat lunch as well. You see, it's not so bad. And I'll see you again in three weeks. Have you got all that?

Patient: I think so ...