

Making appointments

LEARNING OUTCOMES



- To contact the GP practice by telephone or in person to make an appointment
- To negotiate appointment details with the receptionist
- To agree and record appointment times and other details

RESOURCES

- Copies of Resources 1–3
- Cards with excerpts from conversations 1–3 prepared by teacher (Activity 1 Support)
- Audio equipment [🔊27–31](#)

RELATED THEMES

Recording appointments (pages 175–183)

HEALTH SKILLS

Appointments systems operate in almost all GP practices throughout the UK but patients are normally allowed accelerated access in cases of genuine urgency. This theme helps learners arrange a consultation with their GP, either as an appointment or as an urgent case.

Related health information

The government target for NHS GP practices is that all patients should be able to see their doctor within 48 hours of contacting the practice.

SKILLS FOR LIFE

In order to make an appointment with a GP, learners need to be able to:

- request an interview at a suitable time
- provide essential personal information
- listen and respond to a receptionist's suggestions.

Core curriculum

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

- speak clearly in a way which suits the situation (**E**Sc/L1.1a)
- make requests (**E**Lr/E3.3a)
- give personal information (**E**Sc/E3.4b)
- listen for detail (**E**Lr/E3.2b)
- make arrangements with others (**E**Sd/E3.1f).

- Discuss learners' experience of making an appointment with a GP in and outside the UK.
- Compare experiences of:
 - how quickly you can get an appointment
 - other staff available (e.g. whether the practice has a nurse or other medical staff you can see straight away)
 - what happens if you need to see the doctor immediately
 - whether the practice has appointments or a walk-in system
 - what you do if you can't make an appointment.
- Draw out differences in learners' experiences. Learners need to be aware that practices operate different appointment systems, and they need to be familiar with what happens in their own practice.
- Explore what learners understand about the rights of a patient to see a GP or other health professional. Provide information as necessary, for example the government target that a patient has the right to see a health professional, such as a nurse, within 24 hours and a doctor within 48 hours.

What is good about an appointments system for a) the patient and b) the doctor?

What can you do if you want to see a doctor urgently?

ACTIVITY 1 27–29

Explore different conversations between a patient and a GP's receptionist

- In pairs, ask learners to talk about what is happening in each of the pictures on Resource 1 and what ought to happen next.
- Ask them to suggest and practise how the conversations might continue.
- Encourage them to discuss the handwritten note giving details of an appointment and to talk about how they would record and remember appointments.
- Play the three conversations for learners to compare with their own versions.
- Discuss any new or difficult language.

Why is it important to remember and keep your appointment?

Support

- Focus on the pictures one at a time with the group.
- Help and encourage learners to talk about each picture and read the speech-bubbles aloud.
- Select examples from the audio script of follow-up statements for each of the three pictures, and mount them on cards.
- Distribute the cards to pairs of learners to match to a picture and speaker.
- Play the conversations one at a time, pausing for learners to find the right card, revising their matching if necessary.

ESOL

- Learners will need support in handling unpredictable responses such as 'he's fully booked today'; 'No, I can't fit you in ... I'm sorry.' Practise different replies.
- Help learners prepare for a range of responses, such as 'I'm afraid Dr X is off sick today. Do you want to see Dr Y?'; 'The doctor's very busy. Will you see the nurse?'; 'There are about ten before you in the queue, but you can wait if you like.'

TIP

Intervene with questions and supply key vocabulary to keep the discussion flowing.

ACTIVITY 2 30–31

Understand and respond to a GP's receptionist

- Play the conversations between two further patients and the receptionist. Talk about what is happening in each one.
- From Conversation 4 (track 30), ask learners to:
 - practise spelling their own names and addresses to each other in pairs
 - write down the time and date of the appointment. (See the model on Resource 1.)
- From Conversation 5 (track 31), ask learners to:
 - complete the gap-fill exercise on Resource 2 (point out that the words in the box can be used more than once)
 - practise saying the sentences aloud, copying the stress on words and parts of words ('He's been vomiting and has a high temperature') and intonation from the audio clip.
- Review results. Make sure learners know how to use 'but' to express difficulty or disagreement with what has been said.

What types of situations are urgent?

Support

- Play the two conversations more than once.
- Replay relevant short sections as necessary for each part of the activity.
- For Conversation 4 (track 30), ask learners to pick out and repeat the appointment details. Revise the writing of days, dates and times.
- For Conversation 5 (track 31), ask learners to listen for the words 'If it's urgent ...' and to repeat the sentence that follows, ensuring understanding of 'fit him in'.
- Play Conversation 5 sentence by sentence, with pauses for learners to complete the gap-fill exercise.

ESOL

- Spelling names may need revision. Discuss what information learners might have to spell when making appointments.
- Introduce some phrases for offering to spell a name (e.g. 'That's ...'; 'I'll just spell that for you.').
- Set up pairs to practise; circulate to check and correct individual problems with specific letters.

ACTIVITY 3

Practise making a telephone call to a GP practice

- Set up a telephone role-play in pairs, using the scenario cards from Resource 3.
- Use real telephones or sit learners back to back so they can't communicate through gesture or body language.
- Review the role-play and make a list of useful questions and vocabulary.

What is the key information you need to remember when you make an appointment?

*Do you have to say **why** you want the appointment?*

Support

- Read through one of the scenario cards with learners, asking direct questions to check understanding (e.g. 'When does he want the appointment?' 'Is it urgent?').
- Discuss the roles and, from learners' suggestions, build up and display a list of responses to the receptionist.
- Role-play the scenario with one of the learners before asking them to practise the conversation in pairs.

ESOL

Work with learners to build up a bank of useful words and expressions for making an appointment at their GP practice. Suggest they design a checklist of things to do and say which they can refer to when making a real appointment.

Action

- Ask learners to identify a primary medical care or health service they need or would like to visit, such as a GP practice, a dentist, an optician, a physiotherapist, a counsellor, a homeopath, a pharmacist who offers cholesterol testing, etc.
- Ask them to make an appointment with the relevant service.
- Have a feedback and review session on the process of making an appointment.
- Provide a writing frame for learners to record individualised information and useful phrases to use when making appointments at their GP practice, dentist, etc. Include sections such as:
 - things I can say (e.g. 'Can I make an appointment to see ...?')
 - things I may hear (e.g. 'I can fit you in at 10.')
 - useful phone numbers (e.g. GP practice, dentist, etc.).

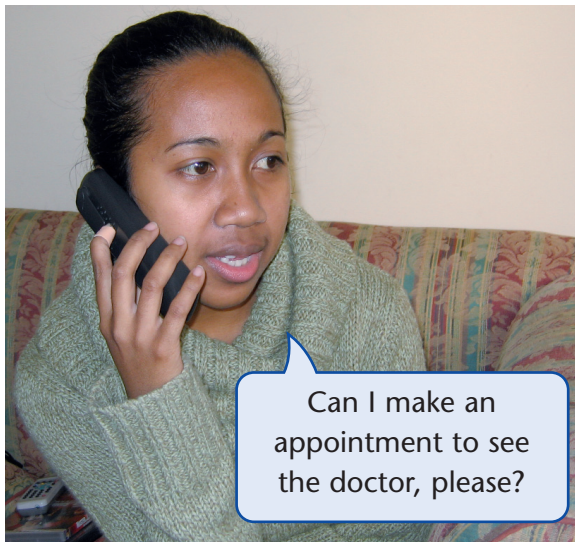
TIP

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

Making appointments

RESOURCE 1

27 1



28 2



29 3



Tuesday 6th
5:15 pm
Dr Ahmed

Conversation at a GP's Reception



PATIENT: I need to see the doctor today. My little boy _____ .

RECEPTIONIST: We're fully booked today, I'm afraid.

PATIENT: _____ he's ill and I'm _____ about him.

RECEPTIONIST: You can see Dr Green at 10:30 tomorrow.

PATIENT: _____ he's very sick. He's _____ and has a high _____ .

RECEPTIONIST: If it's _____ , I'll see if the doctor _____ today.

PATIENT: Please ask the doctor to see my son now though.

RECEPTIONIST: All right. As it's _____ .

But is ill temperature urgent can fit him in
very worried been vomiting

SCENARIO 1

PATIENT

You want to make an appointment to see Dr Ahmed this week.

It isn't urgent.

You would like an appointment in the evening because you are busy in the day.

RECEPTIONIST

I'm afraid Dr Ahmed is fully booked this week.

Dr Green is free at 10:30 on Tuesday.

I have no evening appointment until next Monday.

I might be able to fit you in at 5 o'clock on Friday.

SCENARIO 2

PATIENT

You want to make an appointment for your child with Dr Green.

Your child has a bad cough and a temperature.

You want to see the doctor today.

RECEPTIONIST

I'm afraid Dr Green is fully booked.

As the patient is a child, I can fit you in as an urgent appointment.

I might be able to fit you in with Dr Golden.

SCENARIO 3

PATIENT

You have a rash on your skin.

You want to make an appointment to see Dr Golden.

You work in the day until 5 pm.

RECEPTIONIST

Dr Golden is free on Wednesday at 10:45.

His first evening appointment is on Thursday at 4 pm.

He also has a space on Thursday at 10 to 6.

SCENARIO 4

PATIENT

You want to see Dr Green.

You can come tomorrow (Tuesday) before 11 am.

You can't come until after 4 on Wednesday or Thursday.

On Friday you can only come at 5 pm or later.

RECEPTIONIST

Can you come on Wednesday at 10:45?

In that case, what about Thursday at the same time, or Friday?

I can fit you in with Dr Ahmed first thing tomorrow morning.

ACTIVITY 2 / Resource 2

Conversation 4

The note should read something like this:



Wednesday 7th
9:40 am
Dr Golden

Conversation 5

Patient: I need to see the doctor today. My little boy is ill.

Receptionist: We're fully booked today, I'm afraid.

Patient: But he's ill and I'm very worried about him.

Receptionist: You can see Dr Green at 10:30 tomorrow. That's the earliest appointment we have.

Patient: But he's very sick. He's been vomiting and has a high temperature.

Receptionist: If it's urgent, I'll see if the doctor can fit him in today.

Patient: Please ask the doctor to see my son now though.

Receptionist: All right. As it's urgent.

ACTIVITY 1



Conversation 1

Receptionist: Can I make an appointment to see the doctor, please?
My name's Gina Dutton.

Receptionist: Are you registered with us?

Patient: Yes.

Receptionist: And how do you spell your name?

Patient: D-U-T-T-O-N.

Receptionist: D-U-double T-O-N. Thank you. And what's your address, please?

Patient: 36 Stanmore Gardens. That's S-T-A-N-M-O-R-E ...



Conversation 2

Patient: I need to see the doctor.

Receptionist: He can't see you until tomorrow, I'm afraid.

Patient: But the pain's so bad! I can't wait till tomorrow.

Receptionist: I'm sorry, he's fully booked today.

Patient: Please, it's really bad. I have to see him.

Receptionist: Oh ... well ... if it's urgent ... Is it urgent?

Patient: Yes, it is. I must see him now.

Receptionist: All right. Sit down and I'll ask him to see you as soon as the next patient comes out.

Patient: Thank you. I feel very ill and I think I'm going to faint!



Conversation 3

Receptionist: I'm sorry, we're fully booked this morning. What about 4 o'clock?

Patient: I can't come then. Are you sure you can't fit me in now?

Receptionist: No, I can't ... I'm sorry. I can give you an appointment at 9:15 on Thursday.

Patient: That's a long time away. What about tomorrow? Can I come between 5 and 6?

Receptionist: Let me see ... it's difficult ... but I'll see what I can do.

Patient: Thank you.

ACTIVITY 2



Conversation 4

Patient: Can I make an appointment to see the doctor, please?

Receptionist: Yes. Are you registered with us?

Patient: Yes.

Receptionist: And your name, please ...?

Patient: Stephen Billingham.

Receptionist: Sorry ... did you say 'Billinghurst'?

Patient: Yes, Billingham ... that's B-I-L-L-I-N-G-H-U-R-S-T.

Receptionist: Billingham ... right. Address ...?

Patient: 35 Shelley Street.

Receptionist: Which doctor would you like to see?

Patient: I don't mind. Whoever can see me.

Receptionist: Well, I can fit you in with Dr Ahmed tomorrow morning at 9.

Patient: Oh ... can't I come today?

Receptionist: I'm afraid not. We're fully booked.

Patient: Oh ... I'll come tomorrow then ... Did you say 9?

Receptionist: Yes.

Patient: Could it be at 9:30?

Receptionist: Well ... I can make it for 9:40 but that'll be with Dr Golden.

Patient: That's all right ... So that's tomorrow at 9:40 with Dr Golden.

Receptionist: Yes ... tomorrow, Wednesday 7th, at 9:40.

Patient: Thank you. I'll see you then.



Conversation 5

Receptionist: Hello.

Patient: I need to see the doctor today. My little boy is ill.

Receptionist: We're fully booked today, I'm afraid.

Patient: But he's ill and I'm very worried about him.

Receptionist: Poor little thing! You can see Dr Green at 10:30 tomorrow. That's the earliest appointment we have.

Patient: But he's very sick. He's been vomiting and has a high temperature.

Receptionist: Oh ... Well, if it's urgent, I'll see if the doctor can fit him in today. Normally, though, you must make an appointment. It's only fair to all these other people who're waiting.

Patient: Thank you. I will make an appointment normally. Please ask the doctor to see my son now though.

Receptionist: All right. As it's urgent. Just wait there for a moment. Your name is ...?

Patient: Fatima Sharif ... and this is Hassan.