

Lesson 13: Getting Sick and Going to the Doctor

Welcome to Lesson 13 of the Everyday English Speaking Course! Today you're going to learn phrases for not feeling well, and how to talk to a doctor about health problems and treatments.

Conversation #1 – Not feeling well

Dave: Hey Paula. Are you OK?

Paula: I'm a little under the weather. I woke up with a sore throat and a runny nose.

Dave: Are you running a fever?

Paula: I don't think so... it's probably my allergies acting up. I'm also starting to get a headache.

Dave: Well, make sure you get some rest.

Paula: Yeah, I'm gonna try to take it easy today. ACHOO!

Dave: Bless you. Here's a tissue.

Paula: Thanks.

Conversation Vocabulary & Phrases

To say you're feeling sick, you can use these phrases. Say the first two if you are only a little bit sick, and say the second two if you are VERY sick.

- "I'm a little under the weather."
- "I'm not feeling very well."
- "I'm feeling terrible."
- "I'm as sick as a dog."

Here's some vocabulary for specific health problems:



coughing, sneezing, having a fever, and blowing your nose

- **"I'm coughing." / "I have a cough."**
- **"I'm sneezing."**
(when someone sneezes, you can say "Bless you!")
- **"I have a fever." / "I have a temperature."**
(this means your body temperature is hotter than normal)
- **"My nose is stuffed up." / "I have a runny nose."**
(stuffed up = your nose is blocked, you can't breathe)
(runny nose = mucus is dripping out of your nose)
- **"My eyes are red and itchy."**
- **"I have a sore throat."**

These problems might indicate you have a **cold** or **allergies**. What's the difference? **Allergies** are your body's reaction to some external substance – for example, some people are allergic to cats, dogs, dust, or perfume. A **cold** is a viral infection of the respiratory system that you can catch from another person.

There is also a more serious disease called **the flu**. If you have the flu, you'll most likely have a fever, a sore throat, a headache, coughing, and fatigue (that means you're tired).

For problems with specific parts of your body, you can say:

- **"I have a headache."**
- **"I have a toothache."**
- **"I have a backache."**
- **"I have an earache."**
- **"I have a stomachache."**

For all other parts of the body, you can simply say, "My _____ hurts" – for example:

- **"My knee hurts."**
- **"My neck hurts."**

A more extreme way to talk about intense pain is to say "My _____ is killing me":

- **"My throat is killing me."**
- **"My back is killing me."**

This is simply a way to exaggerate the pain; it doesn't mean that you are literally dying.

Finally, here are some phrases you can say to someone who's not feeling well:

- **"Make sure you get plenty of rest."**
- **"Do you want to lie down?"**
- **"Would you like..."**
 - a tissue?
 - some aspirin?
- **"Try to take it easy today."**
- **"I hope you feel better soon!"**

Conversation #2 – At the pharmacy

Jane isn't feeling well, so she goes to the pharmacy (or drugstore) to buy some things.

Jane: Excuse me – where can I find the aspirin?

Employee: It's on aisle seven, near the cough syrup.

Jane: Thanks. And do you carry eye drops?

Employee: Yes – check the shelves next to the prescription center.

Jane: OK. While I'm here, I might as well pick up another bottle of moisturizer.

Employee: You'll find that in the cosmetics section.

Jane: Thanks for your help.

This conversation mentions four items you can find at the pharmacy – **aspirin**, **cough syrup**, **eye drops**, and **moisturizer**.

Aspirin is medicine you take for headaches and general muscle pain. There's a different type of medicine you can take to help clear a stuffy nose – that's called **decongestant**. For constipation, you can take a medicine called a **laxative**.

Pharmacies also often have **vitamins** as well as **prescription medication** – that's strong medicine that you can't buy unless you have a note from a doctor.

To help relieve coughing or a sore throat, you can take **cough syrup**. There are also **cough drops**, which have the same medicine in the form of a hard candy.



Eye drops are used to soothe red, irritated, or itchy eyes.



And **moisturizer** (which is also called **lotion**) is a cream that you can apply to dry skin, to make it more hydrated.



At the pharmacy, you can also get **band-aids** or **bandages** (to cover and protect small cuts).



Most pharmacies also carry items for sexual and reproductive health, such as **condoms** and **pregnancy tests**.



If you are a woman, and you're menstruating (in English we have a different expression for this – we usually say “I'm on my period”) – you'll need **pads** or **sanitary napkins** (that's external protection) or **tampons** (that's internal protection).



Finally, you can buy personal care items like **tweezers** or **nail clippers** at the pharmacy. A **nail clipper** is what you use to cut your nails, and a **nail file** is what you use to smooth out any rough edges.



nail clipper and tweezers

Conversation #3 – Seeing a Doctor

Steve: Hi, I'd like to see a doctor.

Receptionist: Do you have an appointment?

Steve: No. I've just been feeling really sick lately and I'm not getting any better.

Receptionist: OK. Do you have insurance?

Steve: Yup – here's my card.

Receptionist: Thank you Mr. Jones, you can take a seat in the waiting room and I'll call you in a moment.

Receptionist: Steve Jones? The doctor's ready to see you now.

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Doctor: Good afternoon, Mr. Jones. What seems to be the problem?

Steve: My head hurts and my joints are aching.

Doctor: How long have you been feeling like this?

Steve: Three or four days. I thought I was just tired from all the travel, but then today this rash appeared on my back.

Doctor: Can I have a look?

Steve: Sure.

Doctor: I'm going to take your blood pressure. Could you roll up your sleeve, please?

Steve: All right.

Doctor: It looks like it might be dengue fever – but we'll need to take a blood sample to confirm the diagnosis.

Steve: What's the treatment?

Doctor: Rest and hydration – drink lots of fluids, and avoid taking aspirin. You should fully recover in about a week.

Conversation Vocabulary & Phrases

When you go to a **doctor's office** or a **health clinic**, the receptionist might ask you if you have an **appointment** – that is, if you called before to schedule a time to see the doctor. It's OK if you don't, but you might have to wait some time in the waiting room.

The receptionist might also ask if you have **insurance** - that is, a health plan that will pay for your medical treatments. If you have a health insurance plan, you can give the receptionist your card. If you don't have one, then you will need to pay for the treatment yourself.

The doctor will probably ask you these questions:

- **"What seems to be the problem?"**
- **"How long have you been feeling like this?"**

Here are some new words and phrases that you can use to talk to the doctor. These phrases are organized by the part of the body affected by the problem.

Head, Eyes, Nose, Mouth, and Throat

- **"I'm feeling lightheaded."**
= This means you feel dizzy, like you might lose consciousness.
- **"I have a throbbing headache."** *= The word "throbbing" means that there are moments of very intense pain alternated with moments of less pain.*
- **"I have a nosebleed."**
= when blood is coming out of your nose.
- **"I'm having trouble breathing / sleeping / swallowing."**
You can use the phrase "I'm having trouble _____" to say that you're having difficulty with normal bodily functions like breathing, sleeping, or swallowing.

Stomach & Digestion

- **"I have an upset stomach. / I feel nauseous."**
= my stomach is agitated and I might vomit.
- **"I'm constipated. / I'm having trouble moving my bowels."**
= my digestion is blocked and I can't poop.
- **"I have the runs."**
= I have diarrhea.

Muscles & Bones

- **"I think my arm is broken."**
= You can say this if you think you've broken a bone.
- **"My joints are aching."** = Your "joints" are the points where two bones make contact and you can move – for example, your knees, elbows, and wrists are all joints. If you say "my joints are aching" it means that your joints are hurting.
- **"I twisted my ankle."** = Your ankle is the joint between your foot and your leg. If you "twist" your ankle, it means that your ankle was turned in a way that it now hurts.
- **"I dislocated my shoulder."**
= The word "dislocated" means that the bone is out of its correct place.
- **"My wrist is swollen."** = Your wrist is the joint between your hand and your arm. If you say a part of your body is "swollen," it means that it is larger than normal because it has filled up with fluid under the skin.
- **"I pulled a muscle."** = This means you extended a muscle farther than normal, and now it is injured. This is a common injury in sports.

Skin

- **"I have a rash."**
= A "rash" is an unusual mark on your skin (rashes are often red)
- **"I have a bruise."**
= A "bruise" is when your skin turns blue or purple after a violent impact.
- **"I burned myself."**
= A "burn" is when your skin is injured by heat or fire.

- **“I cut myself.”**
= A “cut” is an injury from a knife or scissors – or another sharp edge.
- **“I was bitten by an animal. / I was stung by an insect.”**

Finally, to ask the doctor about the solution to your health problem, you can use the phrase **“What’s the treatment?”** If the doctor says you’ll need some medicine, you can ask **“Do I need a prescription?”** to find out if you will need an official note from the doctor in order to buy the medicine.

Common Treatments

- **“You’re going to need stitches.”**
= closing the cut with thread



- **“I’m going to put your leg in a cast and give you some crutches.”** The “cast” is the hard white covering around the leg. “Crutches” are the two supports that help you to walk.



- **“I’m going to put your arm in a sling.”**



- **“You’re going to need surgery” / “You’re going to need an operation”**

The type of doctor who does operations is called a “surgeon.”



- **“I’m going to give you an injection” / “I’m going to give you a shot”**

In this context, “shot” is another word for “injection.”



- **“We’ll need to take an X-ray.”**



An X-ray can see problems with your bones.

- **“We’ll need to take a blood / urine sample and run some tests.”**

*Tests are done in a laboratory, and the results help the doctor to diagnose the problem
(that means to identify the problem)*

- **“You’ll need to see a specialist. I’m going to refer you to Dr. Smith.”**

A **specialist** is a doctor who knows a lot about one specific area – for example, an eye specialist or a heart specialist. The first doctor can give you a **referral** to the specialist – that means he or she gives you the information for the other doctor, so that you can make an appointment there.

Today’s speaking challenge is to call me and leave a message talking about a health problem or injury that you had in your life, and the treatment. [Click here](#) to record a message!