

# The Health Pack

Resource Pack for Literacy tutors and Healthcare Staff



National Adult Literacy Agency

An Áisíneacht Náisiúnta Litearthachta do Aosaigh

[www.nala.ie](http://www.nala.ie)

# THE HEALTH PACK

A NALA Resource Pack  
for Literacy Tutors  
and Healthcare Staff

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Written by Janet Kehelly

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# Introduction

The idea for this pack came from literacy tutors and learners who took part in the NALA Health and Literacy Survey carried out in 2002. The survey highlighted the experiences that people with literacy difficulties and/or low self esteem have when it comes to managing their health.

*“They won’t tell a doctor they cannot read”.*

Those interviewed talked about the difficulties they had reading medicine labels and in choosing the right medicine for different illnesses as well as the difficulties in dealing with the health system and healthcare staff.

*“It is very frightening to have to read a form and sign it”.*

*“It makes me feel powerless to help my child”.*

The sense of powerlessness that patients often feel in dealing with healthcare staff is not a new one and nor is it confined to people who have literacy problems. However, it is compounded when literacy is a problem and reinforces feelings of being talked down to or feeling stupid.

*“I thought the doctor was talking to someone behind me she was so nice”.*

Although healthcare staff are being trained in improving their communication skills with patients, there is also a need for patients to develop their skills. We hope this pack suggests ways that this can happen.

## Content

There are four topics, each given a separate section:

1. Being Healthy
2. Taking Medication
3. Filling Out Medical Forms
4. Being A Patient

**Section 1:** Being Healthy looks at what being healthy means and encourages people to reflect on their own lifestyle choices and the extent to which these impact on their health for better or worse. It uses the familiar themes of diet and stress to do this but there are a whole range of issues which could be more relevant to your group such as children’s health, older persons’ health, gender health, sexual health or mental health.

**Section 2:** Taking Medication explores the complex area of taking medication. The section starts by highlighting the fact that half the people on medication don't take it in the prescribed way. Although personal choice certainly makes up some of that number, there is no doubt that being able to read and understand information is a factor in taking medication safely and effectively.

**Section 3:** Filling Out Medical Forms looks at form filling within the healthcare system and the sort of information commonly requested by healthcare staff. Each local health board area has its own forms and you should get copies from the relevant health board.

**Section 4:** Healthcare Settings looks at what healthcare services are available locally and what issues can arise when visiting the GP surgery and the hospital. These issues include preparing for appointments, communicating effectively with healthcare staff and knowing what is involved in hospital visits.

Before looking at how to use the pack it is important to know what it isn't. It isn't an A to Z on illness and cures and nor is it something that can be photocopied and used directly as a workbook. It is designed to give you ideas and suggestions on how to develop skills which people will find useful in matters relating to their everyday health. It is up to you to adapt the content and ideas to suit the group you are working with. Some sample worksheets are included to give you ideas but it is assumed that you'll adapt these as needed.

The skills that it aims to develop include:

- ♦ Interpersonal
- ♦ Problem solving
- ♦ Decision making
- ♦ Communication

These skills are developed through different activities including:

- ♦ Discussion
- ♦ Reflection
- ♦ Problem solving
- ♦ Role play
- ♦ Information finding

You don't have to use the activity suggested if you think there is a more suitable way for your group to explore this skill. In other words, if your group has limited literacy skills it might be better to taperecord some of the patient/doctor conversations and have a discussion based on what people have heard. If you are using the pack as part of literacy classes you will probably have to make accompanying worksheets to develop literacy skills.

## What do you need to know in advance?

Firstly, you don't need to be an expert in health or an expert in adult literacy to use this pack. What you do need however is the motivation to empower people to play as active a part in their health as possible.

If you are using the pack in a healthcare setting you may find that literacy is a problem for some people in the group. Depending on the person and situation you could tell someone what literacy services are available locally or maybe invite the local literacy organiser in to meet the group or advise you on what to do. On the other hand if you are a literacy tutor and the group want to explore a particular health matter in more detail you could suggest they invite a healthcare worker to talk about the topic.

## How to use the pack

Each section stands alone from the other sections, so you can select a section or part of a section depending on what you want to do. There isn't always a natural sequencing to these and many of the sub-headings stand alone. The content is designed to give you background information and ideas on how to use the material with your group. In some cases sample worksheets are included which could be photocopied but in most cases these are templates for you to work from. The activities suggested can be replaced with ones you think are more suitable for your group.

Always check that material is still relevant and up to date. Medical forms and entitlements are often changed in the December budget so make sure to keep your forms up to date.

There is also scope to invite outside speakers to talk to your group about topics they are particularly interested in. Parents and grandparents might be interested in knowing more about first aid for babies and children, or older people might be interested in hearing how to set up an active aging group. The possibilities are endless!



And of course your group will be shaping the content by bringing in their examples and sharing their experiences.

Each section starts with an overview detailing the:

- ♦ The aim and objectives
- ♦ Suggestions on how to use the material
- ♦ The main content
- ♦ List of key words associated with the content
- ♦ Additional resource material

## Keywords

Each section highlights a number of key words specific to that topic which you may want to introduce at the beginning as part of an activity. Although some health words are difficult, it is important to explain that healthcare workers nearly always use medical words and therefore it is important to recognise what they mean. These are a sample of the words which people hear everyday but don't necessarily understand.

symptoms	prognosis	acute	procedure	dosage
side-effects	diagnosis	chronic	screening	persist

A list of keywords could emerge from a brainstorming exercise followed by the groups definition of what each word means. This could be developed further as a project by making an information sheet which the local healthcare clinic could find useful. The idea is not to limit yourselves to the content but rather to think about how to build on what is there.

If you're not from a healthcare background you can check the meaning of some of these words in Appendix 1. You don't want to risk being seen as a health expert so be sure to explain to the group what your expertise is and who to talk to about specific health issues.

## Resource material

Depending on what you are trying to achieve, it's very likely that you will need to use other material to reinforce your aims. At the end of each section there is a list of resource material which includes further health information, websites and workbooks.

## Icons

The icons listed below give an indication of the sorts of skills and activities used in the pack



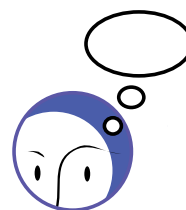
Discuss



Find out



Info



Reflect



Write



List



Read



Computer



Role play

## Giving feedback

Through the Literacytools website ([www.literacytools.ie](http://www.literacytools.ie)) we can post updates on how people are using this pack and share suggestions on how it can be developed further. For this to work well we need your input so please tell us of your experiences, what worked well, what didn't and any suggestions for other activities and resource material.

You can contact NALA by phone at 01 – 8554332, or by e-mail at [nala@nala.ie](mailto:nala@nala.ie) or through the website [www.nala.ie](http://www.nala.ie)

# Being Healthy

## ..... *Section 1*

### Aim

- | To look at the factors which contribute to being healthy.

### Objectives

- | Explore what it means to 'be healthy'
- | Be aware of the factors that determine health
- | Examine how personal choices can impact on health
- | Look at the relationship between food and lifestyle
- | Recognise what stress is and ways of managing it
- | Set personal goals towards improving lifestyle

### Content

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Stress and lifestyle _____	26
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Taking steps towards a better lifestyle _____	29
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### How to use this section

Use whichever of the activities in this section suit your group. You might also want to consider other activities such as:

- | Brainstorm what health is and what makes people healthy or not.
- | Explore the link between health and different variables such as lifestyle, income, location, family, networks, employment.
- | Discuss being responsible for your health and what makes this difficult.

- | Debate should the medical profession be expected to treat people who do not take responsibility for their health.
- | Discuss the notion of the ‘body beautiful’ and who is responsible for promoting that.
- | Explore the role of advertising in influencing children’s food choices.
- | Invite a speaker in to look at parenting and children’s diet.
- | Reflect on personal ups and down and what factors contributed to the low points and what helped overcome them. Equally what contributed to the ups!
- | Design health diaries to suit individual goals.
- | Pull together information about local activities including classes, voluntary work, support groups.
- | Organise someone to do a class on yoga, dance, massage, reflexology .....

## Keywords

hereditary	supplement	diary	plaque	lifestyle	balanced
diet	resolutions	prevention	exercise	genetic	

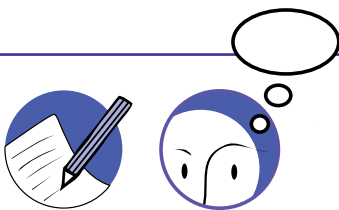
# Being healthy

Everyone has an opinion on what “being healthy” is. Start by asking the group for their opinions and make a list of everything mentioned. Compare the views with the following points.

Being healthy means;

- Having as good a quality of life as possible.
- Preventing illness in so far as is possible.
- Managing illness well when the need arises.

Using these definitions as an example then a person who has asthma is “being healthy” if they don’t smoke and if they take medication as prescribed. On the other hand, a person might give the impression of being healthy because they go to the gym after work but if they also take diet pills to keep their weight down or drink a bottle of wine a day, they could be doing more harm than good. Being sensible and not doing things to excess is probably a good rule!



Write

Reflect

Think about what “being healthy” means to you. Write in what is healthy about your lifestyle and what is not.

My healthy side	My unhealthy side



List

[illegible]

# The factors which determine our health

Many factors influence and determine the health of individuals and of populations. This can be seen in the diagram below. The diagram shows **external** or **structural** factors that influence health; these are social, economic, cultural, and environmental. It also shows **individual factors** that affect our health; these include our age, sex, heredity and lifestyle factors.



Discuss

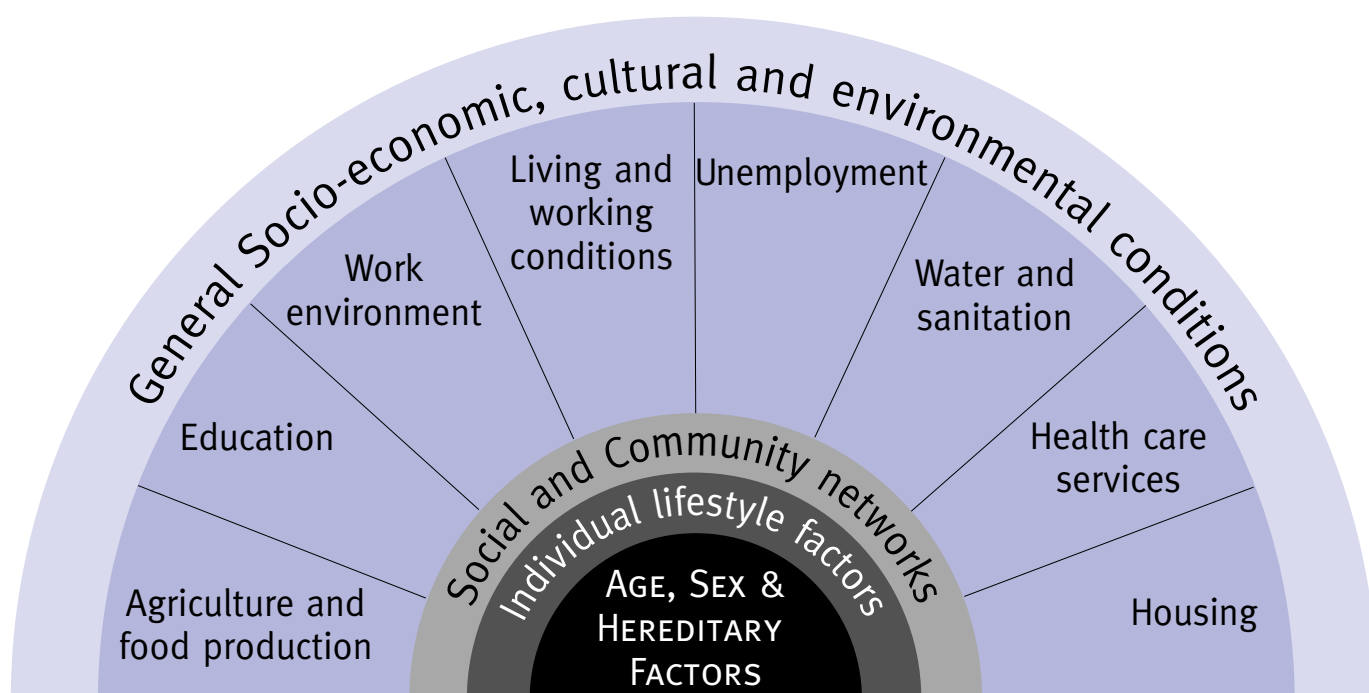
Discuss what each of these factors means. How can they affect a person's health?

What factors do the group think have the strongest and weakest influence? Compare these to the facts!

## The facts

- 53% Individual Lifestyle – “choices I can make”
- 16%: Sex, age and hereditary factors – “things beyond my control”
- 10%: Health care – “the services and supports available to me”
- 21%: Environment – “the things and people around me”

## Determinants of health<sup>1</sup>



1. Department of Health and Children (2000). National Health Promotion Strategy, 2000-2005. Dublin, Stationery Office.

## Six types of health

**Physical health** is being able to rely on your body to work efficiently and relates to being physically fit and well and living to full physical potential.

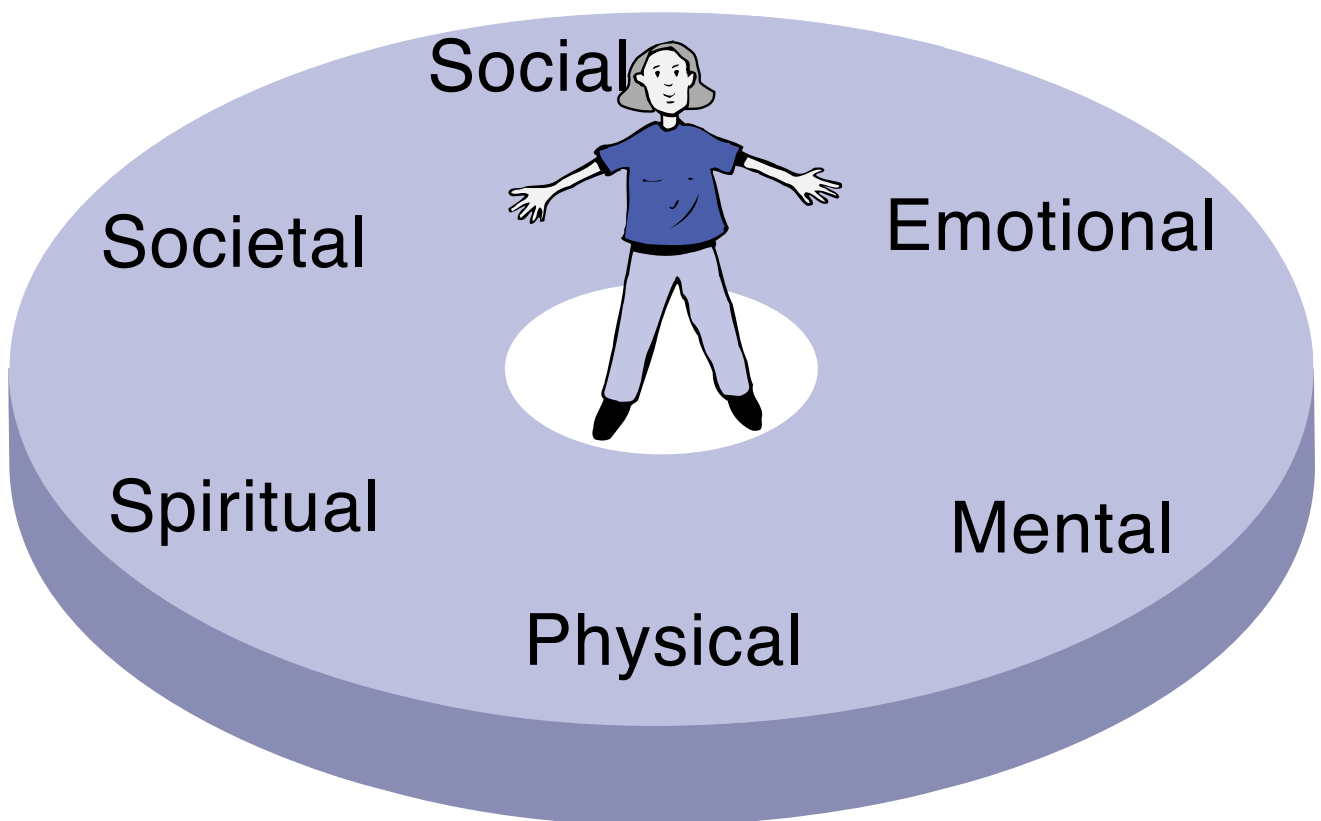
**Mental health** is the ability to think clearly and coherently.

**Emotional health** is being able to recognise and express emotions such as fear, joy, grief and anger. It may also mean coping with normal stress, tension, depression and anxiety that are part of most peoples lives.

**Social health** is being able to relate healthily to other people.

**Societal health** is about promoting healthy and caring communities and neighbourhoods. It is difficult to be healthy in a society that does not provide the resources for basic physical and emotional needs.

**Spiritual health** may be expressed through religious beliefs and practices, love of nature, and is also to do with personal and moral beliefs and ways of achieving peace, serenity and creativity.<sup>2</sup>

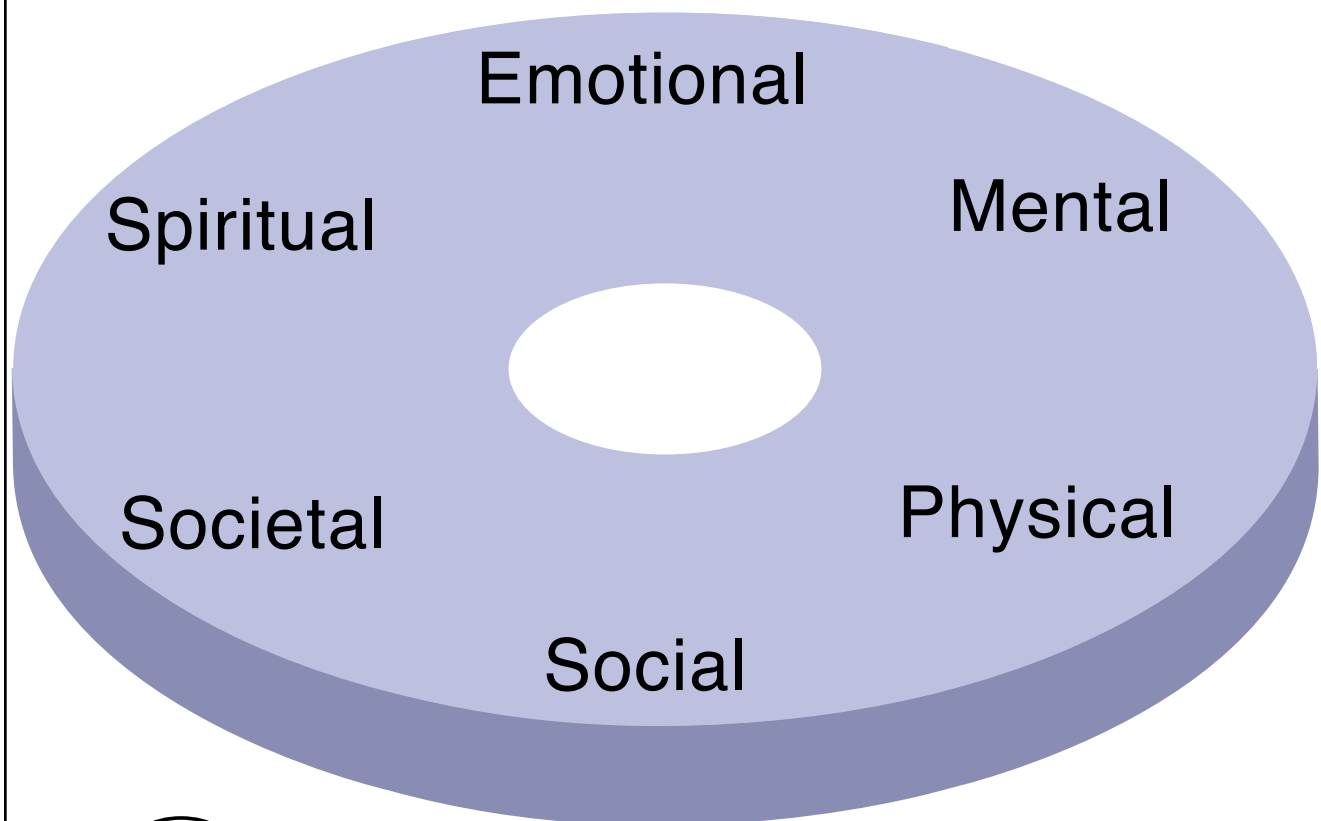


2. Enjoying the Whole of My Health, Being-Well, Health Promotion Unit, Department of Health and Children.





Divide up your health circle into 6 parts, giving the bigger part to the things which are most important in your life. Then write in all the words you associate with that part of your life, for example on the spiritual part you might have prayer, nature, beliefs.



Reflect

Ask yourself if you are happy with the balance in your life, or are there things which you'd like to change?

# Taking steps to improve lifestyle

Sometimes we set ourselves unrealistic targets or aim to make changes that are 'too much, too soon'.

I'll join the gym, go everyday and not eat between breakfast and tea

Making lifestyle changes, even small ones isn't easy and we're good at putting things off or finding reasons not to do anything.

I'll buy these jeans and I should fit into them by the end of the month

I'll give up the fags once the holidays are over

If we don't succeed, we get discouraged. However, lifestyle changes that are well thought out and realistic have a much better chance of working. So it's important to be realistic and plan our changes well.



Discuss

Have a look at the picture of Ann and her son. How would you describe Ann's lifestyle?



Role play

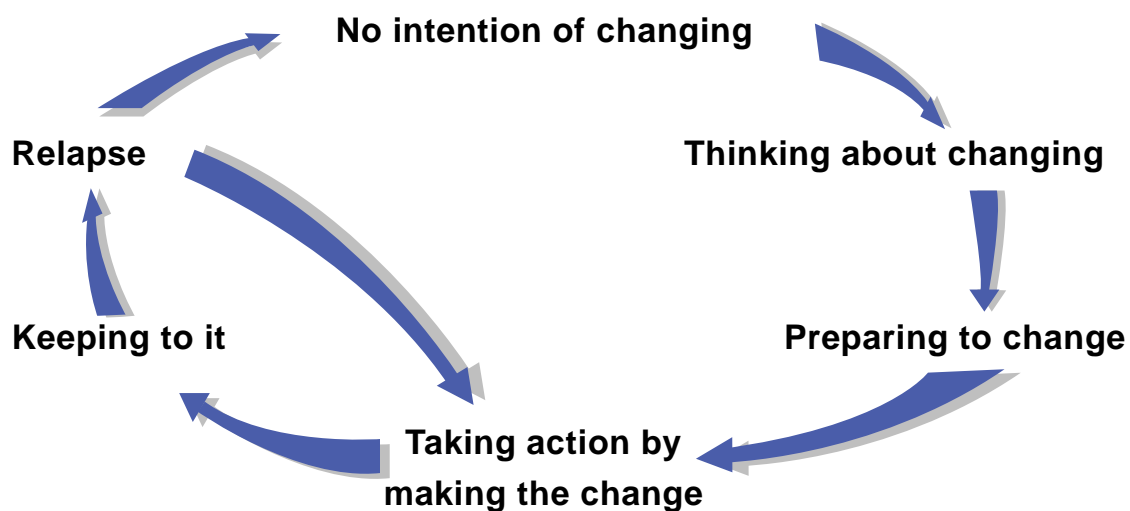
You call into Ann and she tells you that the doctor says she has a chest infection. You think that her lifestyle is unhealthy and you decide to offer some friendly advice. Continue in a role play and afterwards discuss how it felt to give advice and to take advice.



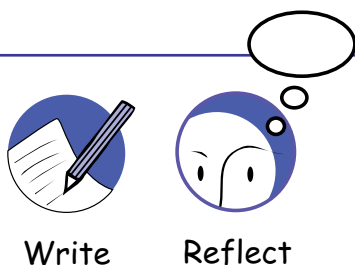
## Stages of change

Lifestyle changes that are well thought out and realistic have a much better chance of working.

There are a number of stages involved in making changes.



Take a look at the 'relapse' point. We're all familiar with that. For example, if we're trying to stop smoking we might relapse by having 'just the one'. Relapses are common and there are two ways to deal with them. One is to throw in the towel and use the relapse as an excuse to give up. The other is to see it as a lapse, pick yourself up and keep going towards a healthier life.



What lifestyle changes have I made in the past?

Have I been able to keep to them?

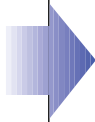
What makes it difficult to keep to keep on track?

What techniques have I used when my will power is low?

How do I respond when I have a relapse?



Look at your own lifestyle and list the things which are not good for your health.  
Then ask yourself what can you do to change.



## Taking responsibility for childrens' health

Parents responsibility for their children's health starts even before conception, for example when the mother starts taking food supplements such as folic acid. The choices that a mother makes about smoking, drinking alcohol and her diet all have long term impact on a child's physical and emotional well-being. Parents' responsibilities continue during pregnancy, infancy, on through childhood, onto adolescence and sometimes beyond.



List the types of decisions which parents make at each stage of their child's development. An example has been given in each section to get started.

Pre-pregnancy	Pregnancy	Infant	Child	Adolescent
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Taking folic acid</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Avoid alcohol and cigarettes</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Being immunised</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Regular dental checks</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Rubella vaccine</li></ul>

## Staying healthy

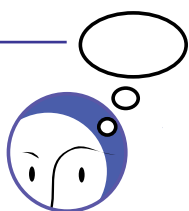
### “Your health is your wealth”

Being healthy is more than the absence of sickness and disease. It’s also about feeling good about yourself. In the same way that people get their car serviced to make sure that it is running well, our bodies also need to be serviced and looked after. There are many things we can do to keep well and prevent illnesses happening in the first place.

Being healthy requires a number of things:

- Understanding how your body works and what it needs to stay fit and well.
- Believing that your health matters.
- Being aware of what illnesses may effect you.
- Knowing how to protect yourself against illness and disease.
- Being able to read leaflets and understand health campaigns.
- Knowing what services are available and how to access them.

Being able to do these things depends on having information, knowing where to get information and being able to interpret that information and act upon it. This often requires good reading and communication skills which can put people with literacy problems and low self-esteem at a disadvantage when it comes to maintaining good health and preventing illness. Information can also be misinterpreted or misunderstood which can cause huge problems. This happens not just at an individual level but also at a national or international level, particularly in relation to the spread of disease.



Reflect

Can you think of cases where information has been misunderstood or wrongly presented?

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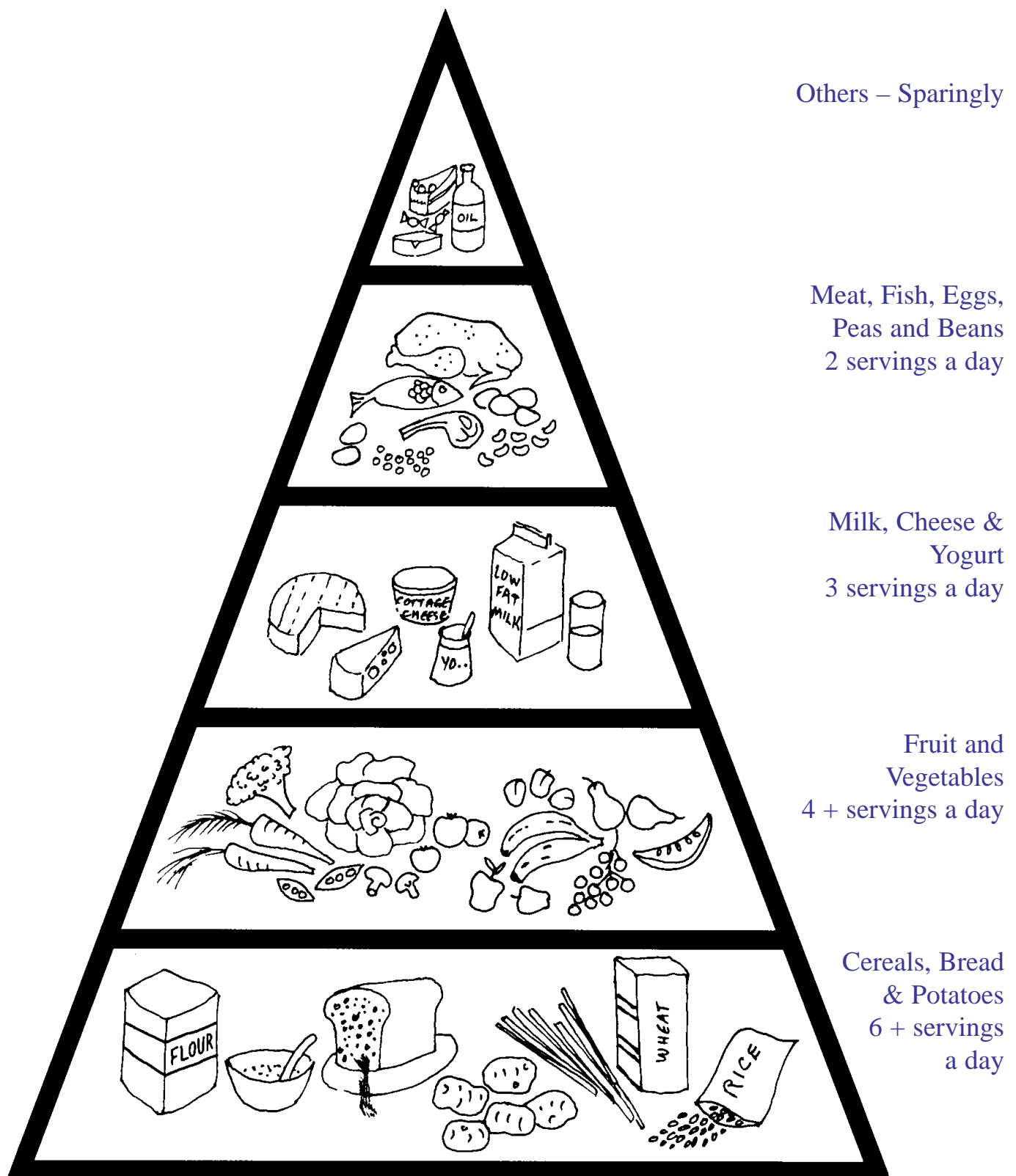
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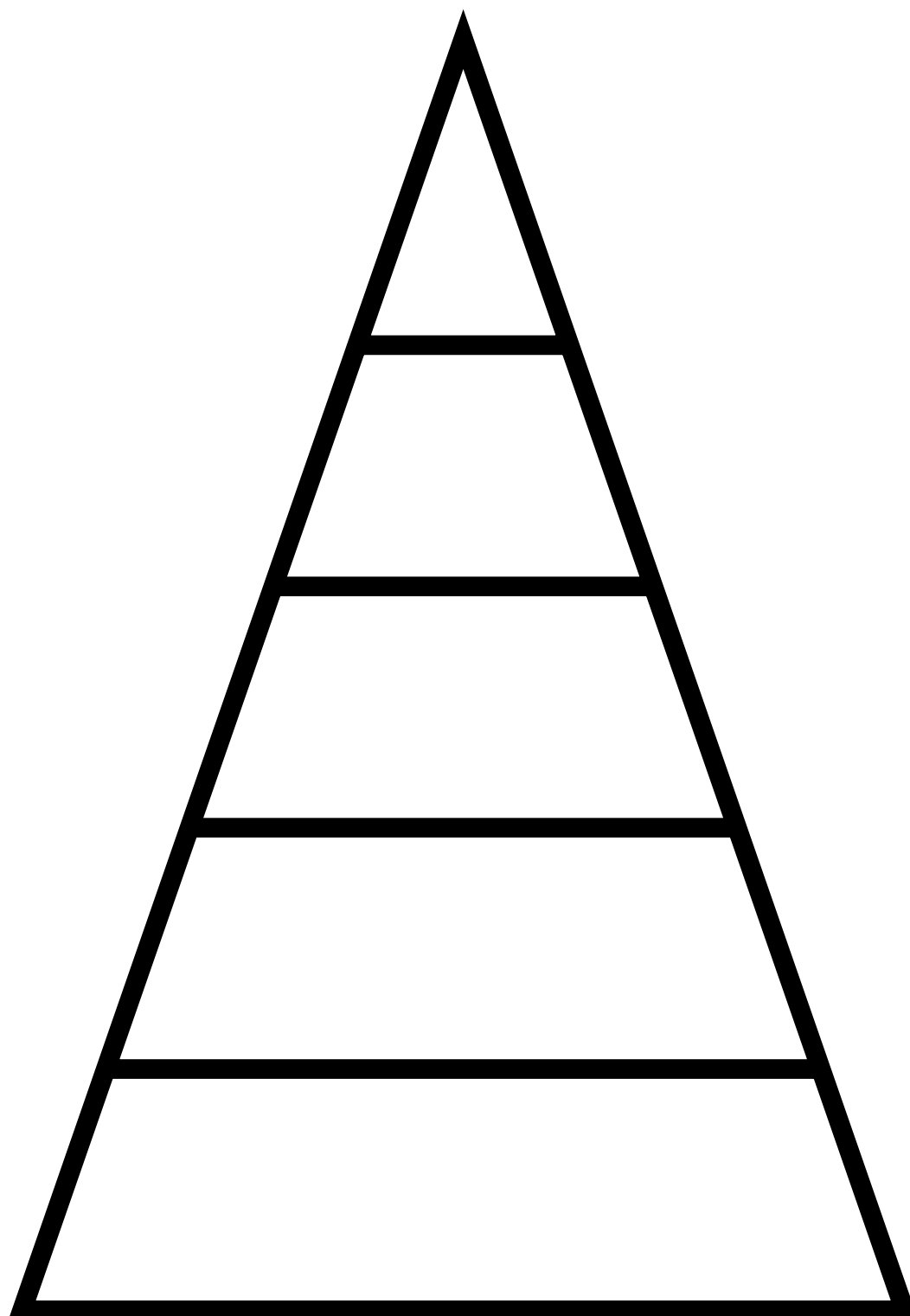
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# Food and Lifestyle

A balanced diet helps maintain a healthy lifestyle. The food pyramid is often used to show how you can achieve a balanced diet.





Fill in your food pyramid from yesterday. For example, a bowl of cereal with milk would be one serving from the bottom shelf and one serving from the dairy shelf.

How does it compare with the recommended pyramid?



# Healthy eating guidelines

Use these guidelines to discuss how learners could improve their eating habits.

## Healthy eating guidelines

- Eat a variety of different foods using the food pyramid as a guide.
- Eat the right amount of food to be a healthy weight and exercise regularly.
- Eat four or more portions of fruit and vegetables every day.
- Eat more foods rich in starch – bread, cereals, potatoes, pasta and rice.
- Eat more foods rich in fibre – bread and cereals (especially wholegrain), potatoes, fruit and vegetables.
- Eat less fat, especially saturated fats. Make lower fat choices whenever possible. Ovenbake instead of frying.
- If you drink or eat snacks containing sugar, limit the number of times you take them throughout the day.
- Use a variety of seasonings – try not to rely on salt to flavour foods.
- If you drink alcohol, drink sensibly and preferably with meals.



Divide into two groups and put together arguments for and against one of these statements.

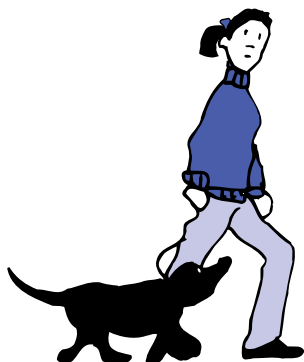
Discuss

- ⇒ "Many schools are introducing healthy lunch guidelines which is great."
- ⇒ "It costs money to eat healthily."
- ⇒ "The media has a lot to answer for!"

# What food does for your body

Food does three things for the body.

Gives  
Energy



Helps growth  
and repair



Protects  
from illness  
and disease



Discuss

Choose a discussion topic relevant to your group, for example:

- ➡ School children are dieting in greater numbers than ever before. Why is this happening?
- ➡ On the one hand we are surrounded by information which tells us what food is good for us and what to avoid and yet surveys show that more and more people are eating readymade meals and fast food.
- ➡ What has changed food habits and is it always for the worst?
- ➡ You are what you eat.



# Stress and lifestyle

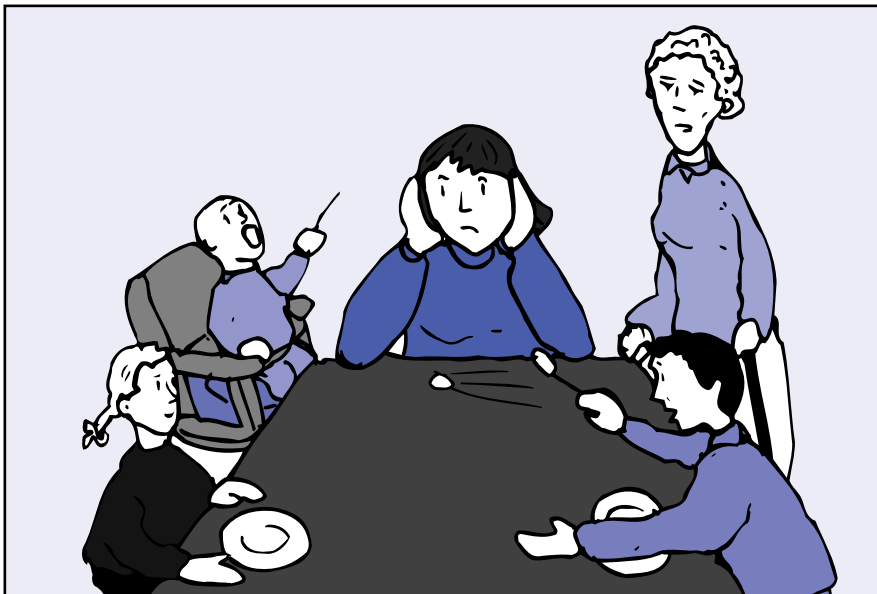
Stress is not always a bad thing. A certain amount of stress is good as it can help to motivate us into action. However, stress becomes a problem when the demands of life are greater than we can cope with.

The stress bar below shows the extreme ends of how stress can impact or not. You could use this to get the group to reflect on how stress effects them.



There are a number of things worth remembering when it comes to stress:

- Everyone feels stressed at some stage.
- Stress is different for each person and what one person finds stressful another may not.
- A person's ability to deal with stress can be different at different times.
- Stress can be managed and recognising when it is taking over is the first step in managing it.



Louise and her three children are living in her mother's house since her separation. Louise's mother looks after the baby when Louise is at her part-time job. Her mother often picks the older children up from school and gets them started on their homework. Louise hopes to rent a place before Christmas but the rents are so high.



**Discuss**

- ➡ What are the stress points in Louise's life and also her mother's life?
- ➡ What about the children?
- ➡ What stresses are around today that add more pressure to people's lives?

## Dealing with stress

Developing ways to deal with stress is essential in maintaining a healthy lifestyle. A first step is to look at whether our own behaviour leads to stress.



Reflect

Can you identify with any of these?

I find it hard to say no at work.

I'm always the one in the family that people come to with their problems.

I never have a moment to relax. . . . . and anyway I'm no couch potato.

I worry all the time about Christmas and paying for it all.

I'm not comfortable talking to people about my problems.

Recognising when you are more stressed than normal is important in doing something about it..

People sometimes try to ignore stress by doing the following:

Drinking



Isolating themselves



Taking on more



All of these actually ADD to the stress. You'd be better off DOING

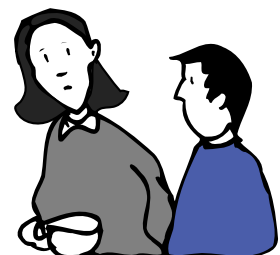
Exercise



Leaving work on time



Talking to someone



# Dental health

Healthy teeth are important for our appearance and are necessary for speaking clearly and chewing food. Bad teeth not only look bad but they also cause pain and bad breath.

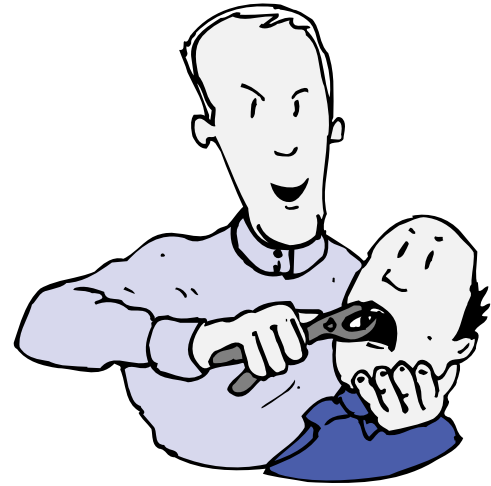
There are three basic ways to maintain healthy teeth and gums:

1. Eating the right foods
2. Brushing twice a day
3. Having regular check-ups with the dentist



Discuss

Dentists do more than drill!



## Dental Words

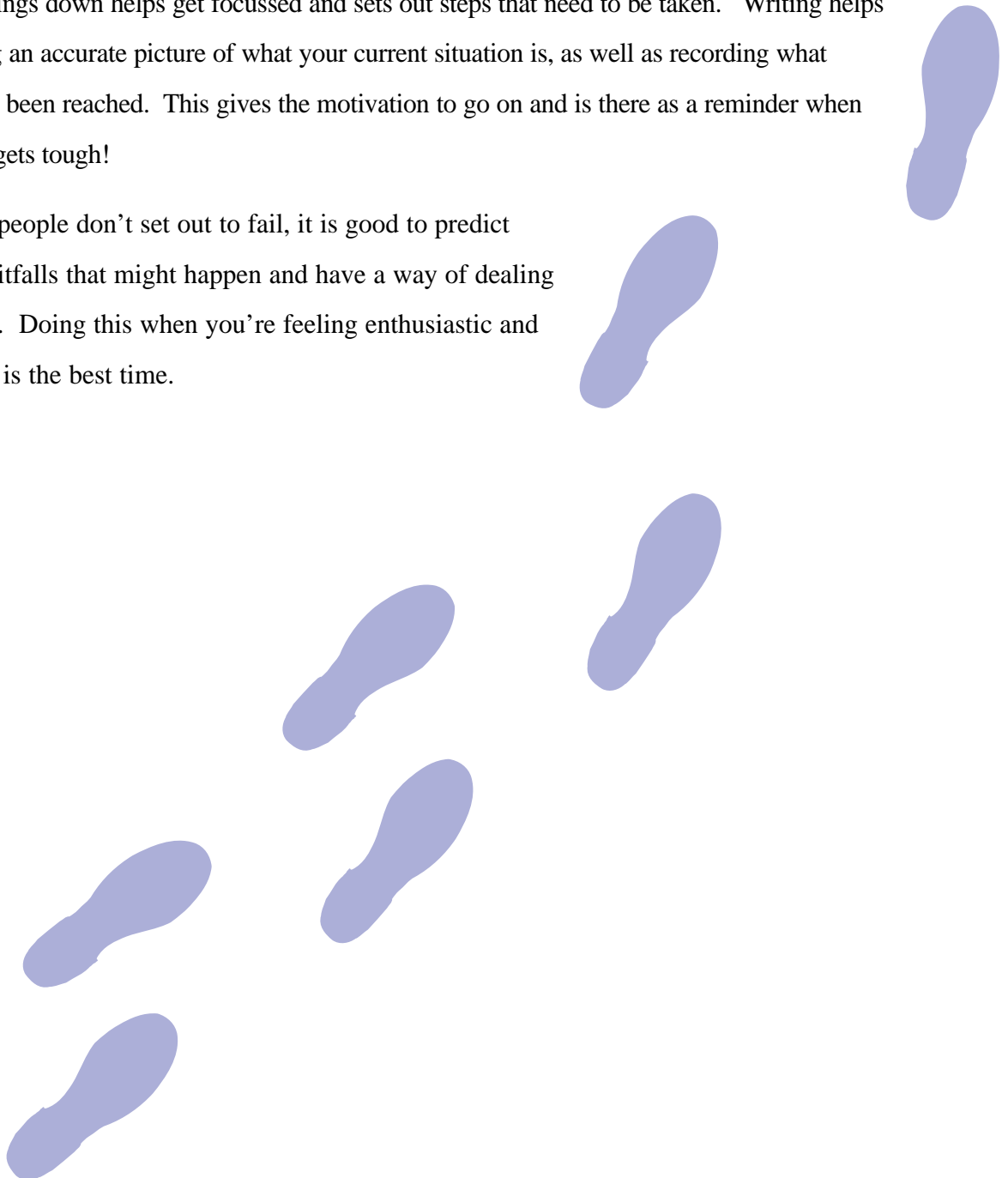
Words	Meanings
Tooth decay/cavity	Hole in the tooth caused when tooth enamel breaks down
Plaque	Sticky substance that builds up around teeth which bacteria feed on
Dentures	False teeth
Cap	False tooth which fits over real tooth
Wisdom teeth	The last four adult teeth at the very back
Baby teeth	The first teeth
Fluoride	Mineral added to drinking water and toothpaste which helps reduce tooth decay
Dental floss	Thread that goes between teeth to remove plaque and food
Braces	Wires to correct the shape of teeth in the mouth
Orthodontist	A specialist dentist who straightens teeth

# Taking steps towards a better lifestyle

Being informed about what a healthy lifestyle is and why it is so important are the first steps in taking control of your health. Most of us could do with making some changes to our lifestyle. These changes can be small, like cutting down on coffee or taking a walk at the weekend. For those who feel that their lifestyle needs a major overhaul, it's still better to break it into manageable changes.

Writing things down helps get focussed and sets out steps that need to be taken. Writing helps in building an accurate picture of what your current situation is, as well as recording what goals have been reached. This gives the motivation to go on and is there as a reminder when the going gets tough!

Although people don't set out to fail, it is good to predict possible pitfalls that might happen and have a way of dealing with them. Doing this when you're feeling enthusiastic and motivated is the best time.




# Keeping a Health Diary

It helps to write down what changes you want to make and keep track of your successes and hiccups! Have a look at how Brendan used a diary to prepare for giving up cigarettes.

## My Health Diary

Brendan used a diary to help quit smoking. He kept a record of what he smoked each day over one week. This gave him a true picture of the number of cigarettes he smoked in a week. It also helped him see what times he smoked most and least.

### What I smoked in the first week of April



	Morning	Dinner	Afternoon	Tea	Evening	Total
Monday	2 at home 1 walking to work	4	3 at break	3	7	22
Tuesday	2 at break 5	3	2	4	10	24
Wednesday	8 (had the morning off)	3	4	3	3 (looking after grandchildren)	21
Thursday	3	2	3	4	15 (went to pub)	27
Friday	3	3	4	2	6	18
Saturday	6	2	10 (watched game on TV)	2	10	30
Sunday	2 (gardening)	3	4 (went to cinema)	4	6	19
TOTAL	32	20	30	22	57	161



## My smoking habit

*Always - walking to work, at break, after dinner and tea, having a drink, watching telly*

*Rarely - near the grandchildren, busy doing something*

*Cost per week - about €50*

Now that Brendan has a better idea of how many cigarettes he smokes and when he smokes most and least, he can predict when he'll find it hardest. Brendan knows that he smokes less when looking after his grandchildren and when he's busy doing jobs.

### *Plan for week 1*

*- Last cigarette on 7th April.*

*Get rid of ashtrays, matches, empty boxes*

*Keep busy in the evening by cleaning the shed and taking the dog for a walk*

*Tell my friends not to offer me a cigarette*

*Ring the National Quitline on callsave 1850 201203*

### *Week 1*

*Starting date: 7th April*

*I did not smoke    OR    I did smoke*

*The hard part was at work and after my dinner*

*The easy part was when I kept myself busy*

*- I thought about them but not all the time*

*What I'm pleased about is I did it - this is the first time I've quit.*

*My family are delighted*

*I saved €50 on cigarettes and €20 on not going to the pub*

### *My plan for week 2*

*Keep it up*

*Paint the gates*

*Go to Joe's party and refuse any cigarettes and not drink too many pints just in case.*

*Take my wife out for surprise with the money I've saved.*



# Resource Material

Resource	Suggested uses
<p><b>Guide to Daily Healthy Food Choices</b></p> <p><b>Health Promotion Unit</b>            Department of Health and Children,            Hawkins House,            Dublin 2            Ph.: 6354000            Fax: 6354372            Web: <a href="http://www.healthpromotion.ie">www.healthpromotion.ie</a></p> <p><b>Home Economics for Junior Certificate</b>            by Carmel Enright and Maureen Flynn.            Published by Folans (1995)</p> <p><b>Moving-On Manual</b> – Available from Cherish            cost €35            Cherish Association of Single Parents,            2 Lr. Pembroke Street,            Dublin 2            Ph. 6629219</p> <p><b>The Irish Heart Foundation,</b>            4 Clyde Road,            Ballsbridge,            Dublin 4.            Ph. (01) 6685001            Fax: (01) 6685896            Email: <a href="mailto:info@irishheart.ie">info@irishheart.ie</a>            Web: <a href="http://www.irishheart.ie">www.irishheart.ie</a></p>	<p>Leaflet containing good, clear information on healthy eating, using the food pyramid. Available from the Health Promotion Unit.</p> <p>Large range of health information leaflets available from health promotion units of each health board. Check out publications database on <a href="http://www.healthpromotion.ie">www.healthpromotion.ie</a></p> <p>Useful tutor resource on basic nutrition, healthy eating, food pyramid.</p> <p>Topics covered include personal development, stress, health issues. Useful handouts and worksheets.</p> <p>The Irish Heart Foundation has a wide range of information on heart health. Issues such as cholesterol, physical activity, smoking – good resource material for tutors and information for students.</p>

**The Health Pack** - The Basic Skills Agency

Cost €19.65

Available from NALA.,  
76 Lower Gardiner Street,  
Dublin 1.

Ph: (01) 8554332

Fax: (01) 8555475

Email: [literacy@nala.ie](mailto:literacy@nala.ie)

Web: [www.nala.ie](http://www.nala.ie)

**The MANUAL – For men on cancer prevention and early detection**

Available from:

Irish Cancer Society,  
43-45 Northumberland Road,  
Dublin 4

Ph.: 01 2310500

Web: [www.cancer.ie](http://www.cancer.ie)

**Women and Health – a workbook**

Published by the Workers' Educational  
Association, 1 Fitzwilliam Street, Belfast BT9 6AW

[www.drugsinfo.ie](http://www.drugsinfo.ie)

[www.malehealth.co.uk](http://www.malehealth.co.uk)

[www.unlocked.ie](http://www.unlocked.ie)

Resources, worksheets and activities with health as the theme.

In addition to this specific booklet, the Irish Cancer Society has a wide range of healthy lifestyle information focusing on cancer prevention.

Topics include knowing your own body, heart health, breast cancer, menopause and osteoporosis. Contains worksheets, quizzes and handouts

Health Promotion Unit site dealing with the issue of drugs. Booklet for parents available on this website.

Information on male health issues. This is a UK based health charity.

Health Promotion Unit site dealing with the issue of alcohol. Tutor resource.

# Taking Medication

## Section 2

### Aim

- To build confidence and knowledge around issues concerning medication.

### Objectives

- Distinguish between the various types of medications.
- Recognise key words associated with different types of medication.
- Feel more confident in talking to the doctor or pharmacist about medication.

### Content

■ Background	35
■ Types of medication	36
■ Taking medication	36
■ Getting advice	37
■ Reading labels	42
■ Medication diary	44
■ Table quiz	46

### How to use this section

- Discussion on how members of the group treat illness, such as going to the doctor, chemist, doing nothing, using traditional cures, taking alternative medicine.
- Discuss what influences the sorts of medication we take.
- Ask the group to make a list of the words on the medicines that they have at home and check for understanding and meaning. Ask the group to come up with their understanding of the word or symbol and ask the local chemist for feedback.
- Invite the local chemist in to talk about taking medication and how the chemist can help.
- Debate whether advertising medication is a good or bad thing.
- Compare Ireland's access to medication with other countries people have visited or know about.
- Identify what makes it difficult to ask the chemist for advice and explore solutions to these problems. Role play might be useful.

### Keywords

pharmacy	prescription drugs	dosage	complete	chemist	alternative medicine
side effects	as required	nausea	apply	consult	

# Background

Repeated studies have shown that as many as half the people taking medication are not taking it properly <sup>3</sup>. In some cases this is out of choice but in others it's because the person has difficulty reading the instructions, calculating the doses or simply remembering to take the medication. This section looks at ways to help people better understand and follow the instructions to take medicine safely and effectively.

In the past, people relied on remedies and cures derived from local herbs and plants. People in the community who knew how to use plants in this way were widely respected as healers. Although many of the old ways have disappeared, some are still used today.

Nettle sting – dock leaf

Sprains – vinegar bandages

Bee sting - vinegar

Sun burn – raw potato

Sore throats – honey

Chilblains – urine

Today, the treatment of illnesses is very different and most people take manufactured medicines bought in the chemist or shop. There are medicines for every illness and the pharmaceutical industry is a very profitable business. However, there is an increase in the number of people who are opting for alternative medicine such as homeopathy, acupuncture, reflexology and aromatherapy.



Discuss

- ➡ What other cures do people know or use?
- ➡ Why do you think that alternative medicine is growing in popularity?
- ➡ The pharmaceutical industry is sometimes accused of being more interested in their profits than our health. Is this fair?

3. Irish Pharmaceutical Healthcare Association

# Types of medication

The most common types of medicines can be broadly categorised into one of three types.

Prescribed by the doctor	Medicine bought over the counter in a chemist or shop	Homeopathic, herbal or vitamin
Antibiotics	Asprin	Tea tree cream
Steroids	Cough bottle	Rescue remedy
Inhalers	Rash cream	Cod liver oil

Medicine can be used for different things:

- To prevent an illness occurring, for example taking a steroid inhaler for asthma.
- To redress imbalances in the bodies system, for example taking insulin for diabetes.
- To cure illness, for example taking antibiotics for infection.

# Taking medication

To take medication properly you need to be familiar with the words used and what they mean. Check with the group what words they are already familiar with. Depending on what comes up you could add others from the list below.

Different types of medication	Directions	Dosage	Side effects
Tablet	Orally	Spoonfuls	Headache
Capsule	Swallow	Tablets	Rash
Cream	Inhale	Puffs	Breathing problems
Bottle	Apply	Apply sparingly	Vomiting
Spray	Dissolve	Drop	Nausea
Drops	Instil		
Sachet			
Powder			
Injection			
Inhaler			
Suppository			
Patch			

Check that you and the group understand the words and phrases commonly used in medicine instructions. For example:

"take at regular intervals"

"excessive pain"

"increased anxiety"

"use sparingly"



The group might come up with suggestions about the meaning of these words but the only way of knowing the exact meaning is to check the chemist or doctor.

## Getting advice

People get advice about their health problems in lots of different ways. Friends and families are often very good for support but not always very qualified! Information sources like leaflets and the internet can provide factual information which may or may not apply. In many cases we self-diagnose and buy medication which we hope will do the trick. Without knowing it we could be doing ourselves more harm than good, so it's always a good idea to get advice from either the doctor or chemist.

People with low literacy skills often find it more difficult to ask for advice and to discuss their symptoms with health professionals than people with good literacy skills. There are a number of reasons for this including fear of exposure, a lack of confidence dealing with authority figures and not understanding medical jargon. This can lead to unsafe and ineffective use of medication as well as reinforcing negative feelings.

Rather than waiting for the chemist or doctor to ask if you understand, a good technique is to politely interrupt and get clarification whenever you're unsure.

### These might be useful

"Excuse me, can I just check something you just said. "

"I'm not quite sure I got that".

"Excuse me, is this what you mean.....".

"Sorry, I'm a bit lost".

## At the chemist

The word 'chemist' has traditionally been used to describe both the shop and the person. However nowadays all chemist shops use the word 'pharmacy' and chemists are often known as pharmacists. They are the same thing.

Many people go to the chemist for a diagnosis and advice. Chemists are experts on medicines and they are also trained to recognise and treat minor ailments and give healthcare advice. They can also tell if someone should go to the doctor.

The more they know about the symptoms the easier it is to diagnose and advise.



Discuss why the chemist is annoyed and how the mother might feel.



Gathering the facts helps the chemist to diagnose what the problem is and advise you. Here is a list of questions the chemist might ask.



Discuss



Write

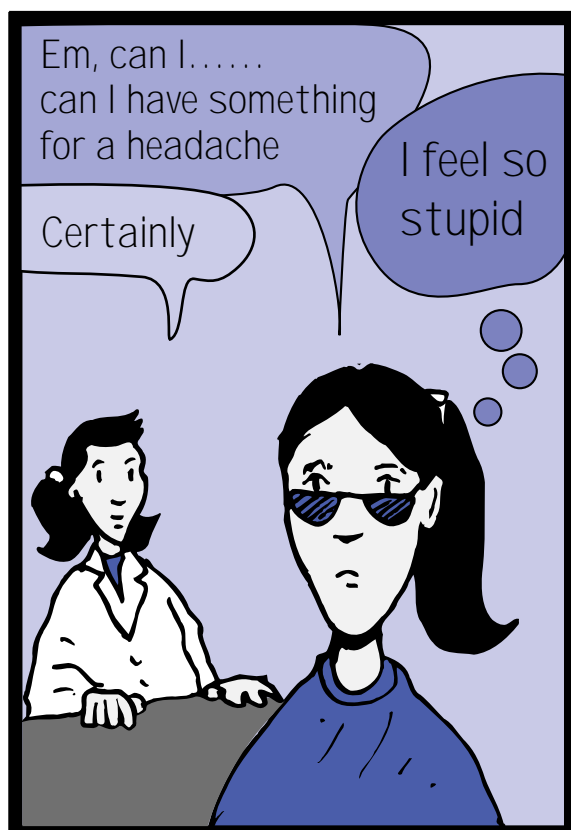
*My symptoms*

- 1. When did I start to feel sick?*
- 2. What are the symptoms?*
- 3. Has this happened before?*
- 4. Has anything happened which may have caused this?*
- 5. Did I go to the doctor or hospital?*
- 6. What medication have I taken for it?*
- 7. What other medication or vitamins am I taking?*
- 8. Any allergies to medication?*



## Asking the embarrassing question

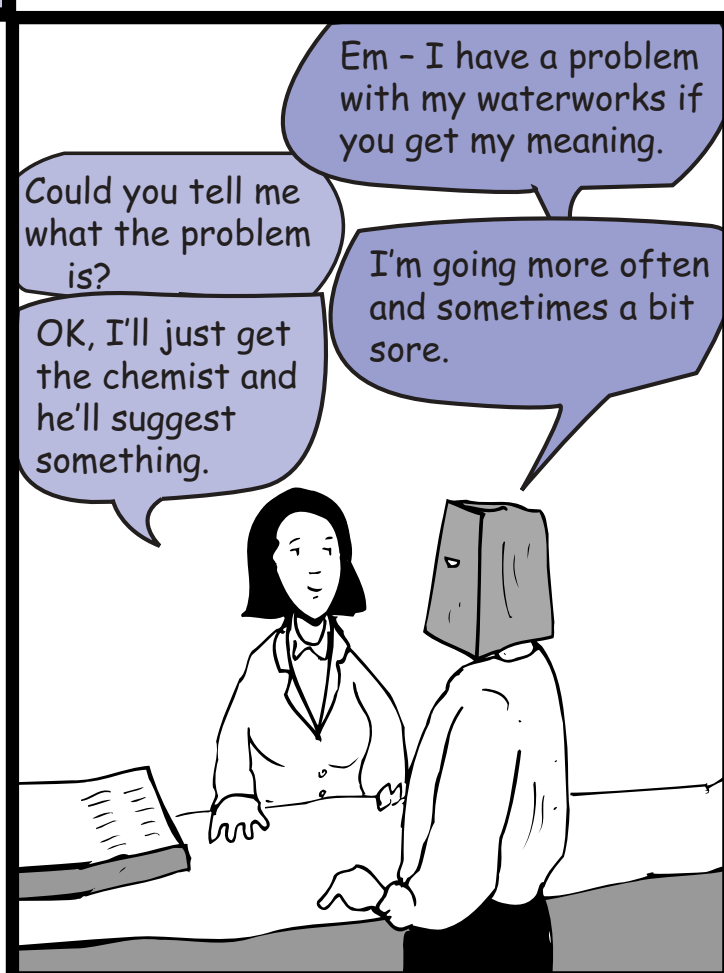
Many of us have at one time or another felt embarrassed or shy about asking the chemist a question. Have a look at Kate's situation.



Kate decides to ask the chemist for advice after forgetting to take the pill yesterday but feels embarrassed.

What advice would you give to Kate on how to feel less embarrassed?

Men are sometimes reluctant to get medical help when they are ill. For example, Tony feels embarrassed about getting help with his peeing problem but eventually gives in by going to the chemist.

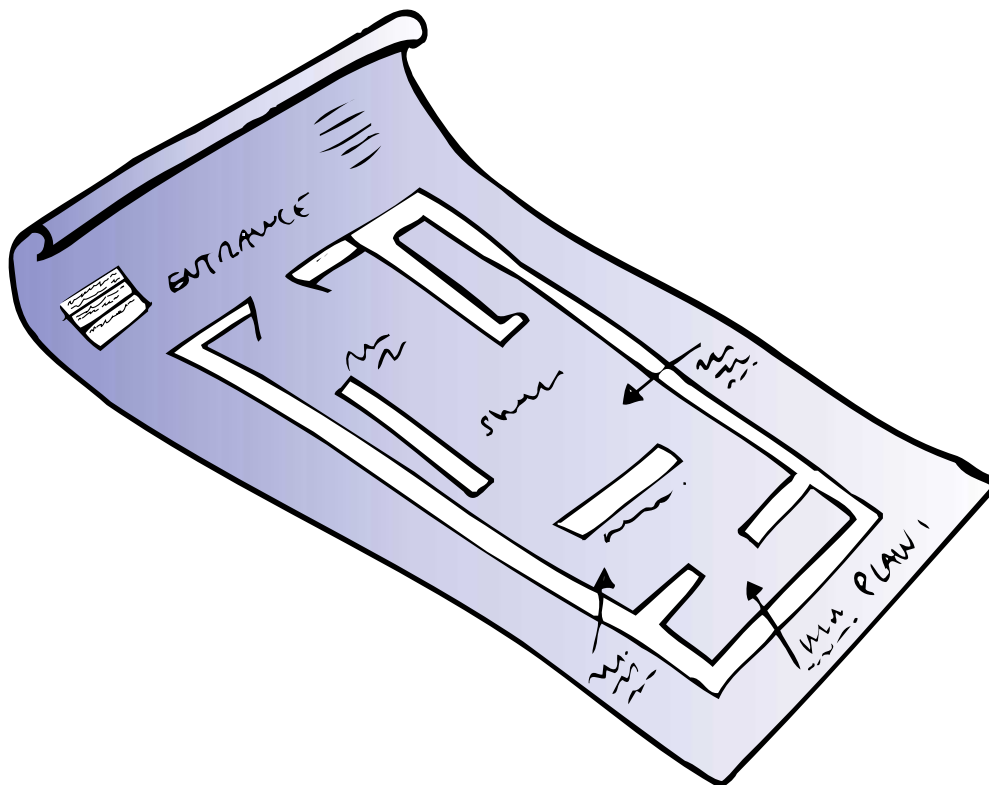




Discuss

You've been asked to design the ideal chemist shop. In smaller groups think about:

- the layout
- what items would go where
- where could you talk in private



# Reading labels

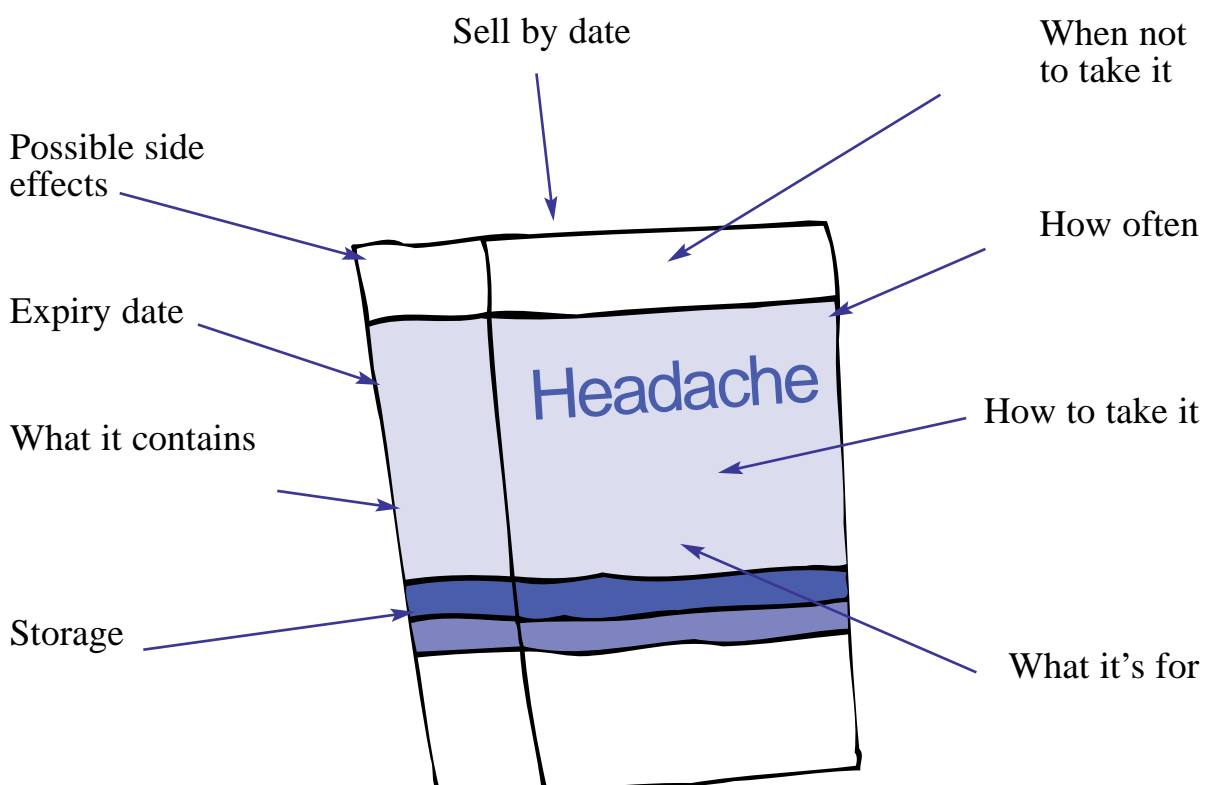
Even with good reading skills, reading medicine instructions can be tedious and confusing. The writing is often very small and there is so much information contained in a small space. Many people end up just scanning to find what they are looking for. For people with reading problems medicine labels can present enormous problems and potentially serious risk. Reading is one challenge and the other is understanding what the information means.

There are four important things to know when taking medication:

1. Taking the right medication for the illness.
2. Taking the right dose at the right time.
3. Knowing what the side effects might be.
4. Knowing if the medication can be taken with other medication.

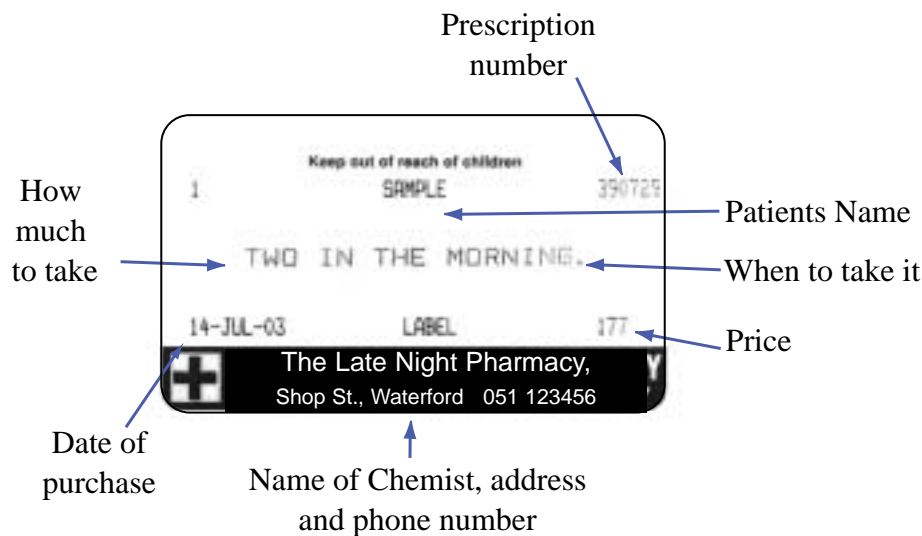


All medicines contain standard information on the box. Additional information is printed on a leaflet found inside the box. Look at the sample below and the information it contains.



# Prescription labels

When the doctor prescribes medication they also write when and how it should be taken. The pharmacist prints this information on a label. The label is then put on the box or bottle. Although labels can vary they do contain standard information which is shown below:

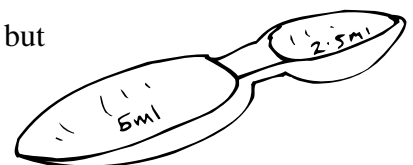


## The key information is

- ⇒ Who the medication is for
- ⇒ The dosage, or how much to take
- ⇒ When to take it
- ⇒ Specific instructions about taking it before or after food
- ⇒ When it was bought



Some medicines come in liquid form, particularly medication for children. The dosage is usually given in millilitres (ml) which can be confusing but they usually give you a spoon or syringe with the measurements marked out. Always check that there is a measuring spoon or syringe in the box and if not, ask the chemist for one.



## Discuss

Ask the group to bring in or write out some of the details from the labels they have at home and see what information is easy to follow and what is difficult to follow. The group might want to discuss their suggestions with the local chemist.

# Medication diary

Taking medication at the right time is the safe and effective way to take it.

Designing a personal medication diary to help someone keep track of when and how much medication to take can be useful. Start by looking at the labels and what the instructions say.

Most instructions are based on taking medication before or after meals and assumes that people eat breakfast, dinner and tea.

So get advice on how to take medication if:

- You work shifts and eat at different times.
- You're looking after a patient who sleeps a lot and you aren't sure if they should be woken to take medication.
- You forget to take or give a dose.



Write

The diary will be more effective if the person has to fill in something. Make sure the diary suits the person and the way they have to take their medication.

## My Medicine Diary

Doctor's name and number: \_\_\_\_\_

Chemist's name and number: \_\_\_\_\_

### Medication I take

Name	How often	What it's for
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

I'm allergic to  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_



This example is for someone taking two types of medication

My Medicine Diary

My doctor \_\_\_\_\_

My chemist \_\_\_\_\_

Name of medicine \_\_\_\_\_

What is it for \_\_\_\_\_

Date started \_\_\_\_\_

Time				
Mon	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Tues	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Wed	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Thurs	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Fri	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sat	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sun	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Date finished \_\_\_\_\_

Name of medicine \_\_\_\_\_

What is it for \_\_\_\_\_

Date started \_\_\_\_\_

Time		before food.
Mon	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Tues	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Wed	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Thurs	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Fri	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Sat	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Sun	<input type="checkbox"/>	

Date finished \_\_\_\_\_

# Medicine table quiz

1. You have a sore ear. Should you
  - a) ask a friend to pour warm cooking oil in?
  - b) go straight to accident and emergency?
  - c) go to the pharmacy or doctor?
2. A chronic sickness is
  - a) a terribly bad sickness
  - b) a life threatening sickness
  - c) slowly developing and long lasting sickness



3. Avoid alcohol means
  - a) don't take alcohol
  - b) don't take as much as normal
  - c) don't take spirits
4. Instruction - Take half a 5ml spoonful three times a day.  
What is half of 5 ml?
5. Instruction - One to be taken twice daily  
How many tablets should you take each day?
6. Instruction - Take 6 tablets on day one and reduce by one until finished.  
How many tablets should you take on day 3?
7. Instruction - Take two once weekly on the same day each week  
How many days a week should you take tablets?
8. True or False?  
Medicines shouldn't be stored in the bathroom because the heat and moisture can damage them
9. True or False?  
Chemists and pharmacists are the same

Answers to quiz on next page.

# Resource Material

Irish Pharmaceutical Healthcare Association  
(IPHA),

Franklin House,  
140 Pembroke Road,  
Dublin 4

Ph.: 6603350

Fax: 6686672

Email: info@ipha.ie

Web: www.ipha.ie

**Knowledge is the Best Medicine –**

Information on taking medication.

**Managing Your Minor Ailments**

**Effectively**

**Vaccination – Children have a right – we  
have a responsibility**

**Your Child's Immunisations**

Answers:      1. c)                      2. c)                      3. a)                      4. 2.5ml                      5. 2  
                    6. 4                              7. 2                              8. True                      9. True



# Filling out medical forms

## Section 3

### Aim

- To provide information on forms used in the health system and patients' rights within the health system.

### Objectives

- Know where and how to apply for health services.
- Recognise key information being requested.
- Practice filling in forms.
- Raise awareness of patients' rights and access to information.

### Content

- Applying for health services \_\_\_\_\_ 50
- Filling out forms \_\_\_\_\_ 53
- Making appointments \_\_\_\_\_ 58
- Your medical records \_\_\_\_\_ 63
- Resource material \_\_\_\_\_ 65

### How to use this section

- Look at how the health system works.
- Invite a speaker in to talk about medical entitlements.
- Discuss what changes are currently planned which will effect people.
- Explore what inequalities people feel exist in the system and what people can do to voice their opinions.
- Gather as many forms as possible through contacting health services, calling into local services and using the internet.
- Design useful information cards.
- Use calendars and abbreviations for days of the week and months.
- Use role play for making appointments.
- Make a list of patients rights.

- Make a health record to suit the patient.
- Information gathering involves a range of skills which may meet some of the requirements for FETAC. Try to link the use of the phone or requesting information or completing forms to meet these requirements.
- This could be a good section to show the group how the internet works. Each health board has a website and it's likely that some of the group will recognise some of the locations or photos.

## Keywords

health boards	benefits	application	dependents
eligible	entitlements	PPS	applicant
spectacles	out-patients	refer	fluids
appointment	preparation	fasting	consent

# Applying for health services

The state provides health services to all citizens and charges according to income. Some people are entitled to medical cards and others have to pay for services. Approximately a third of Irish citizens have private health care with BUPA or VHI.



## Discuss

Why do so many people have private health cover when the state provides it free?

To apply for health benefits you have to know what you might be entitled to. There are a range of benefits available which are means tested or needs assessed. Many people do not claim everything they might be entitled to because they do not know it is available. Knowing what is available is the first step. Check with the group what their existing knowledge of benefits is.

This is a list of services that provide information and application forms.

SOURCES	
Local Health Centre	Information and forms
Regional Health Board	Good for an overview of what is available. Each health board has a website giving details of what is available. Forms can be downloaded and printed off.
Doctors/dentists/opticians	All have the necessary tax and social welfare forms for treatment.
Citizens Information Centre (C.I.C)	Offer free information on all issues including health. CIC's help citizens access their rights and entitlements.
On-line OASIS website <a href="http://www.oasis.gov.ie">www.oasis.gov.ie</a>	This site aims to provide information to the public on a wide range of topics, including health. It explains what is available, who is eligible, criteria for health services, where to get forms, appealing decisions.



## Computer

For those with computer access this could be a good opportunity to introduce computers into the session. It could simply be a matter of showing people what their local health board site looks like.

## What am I entitled to?

Most people who have a medical card or private health insurance know the basics of what they are entitled to but not always the detail. This can result in people not maximising their entitlements. In the case of medical card holders, entitlements can change every year after the budget.

## Medical cards

Medical cards are issued by the health board and entitle the card holder to get certain health services free of charge. In most cases this also covers the card holders children and dependent spouse. Doctors who accept patients with medical cards have a GMS (General Medical Services) contract with the health board.

**Remember this information can change so always check it before using with the group.**

**If you have a medical card you are entitled to: (2004 information)**

- GP services
- prescription medicines
- in-patient hospital stays
- out-patient hospital services
- dental services
- hearing services
- medical appliances such as crutches
- medical care during and after pregnancy
- and €10.16 when each child is born

### Who is eligible?

- Everyone over 70 years
- In general, people who are getting the maximum means tested payment (full unemployment benefit, disability benefit)
- One parent family payment
- Children in foster care
- Students between 16 – 25 who are dependent on parents who have medical card

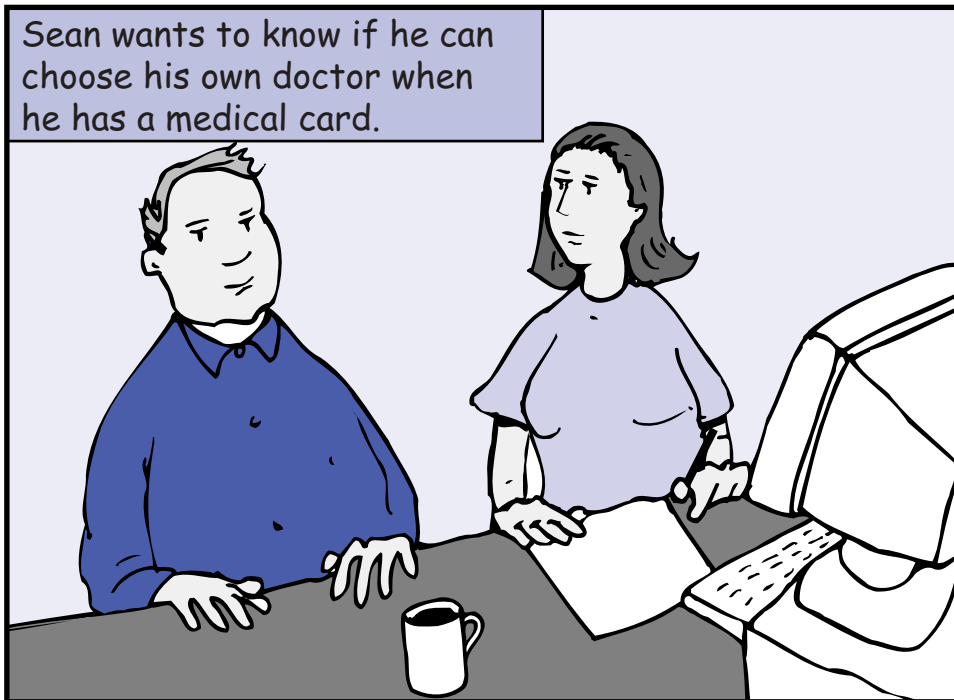


Ask the group to gather information about entitlements that are relevant to them.

Find out

## Checking entitlements in the local C.I.C (Citizens Information Centre)

Sean wants to know if he can choose his own doctor when he has a medical card.



The illustration shows a man (Sean) and a woman (information giver) sitting at a desk. Sean is on the left, wearing a blue shirt, looking towards the woman. The woman is on the right, wearing a light blue shirt, looking at a computer monitor. There is a white mug on the desk between them. The background is a plain light blue wall.

**Sean:** Can I choose my doctor?

**Information giver:** Yes, you can choose one from a list of doctors in your area. The health centre will have a list.

**Sean:** Can I change if I don't like the doctor?

**Information giver:** If you are unhappy with the doctor you should contact the local health board. You will have to fill out a form saying why you want to change.

A sample Change of Doctor form is on page 56

# Filling out forms

Forms can sometimes be confusing and difficult to understand. However, there are some standard things that are on every health form.

It might be useful to put those details on a small card. You could carry it in a purse, or wallet or pocket and use it when you're filling in forms.



Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Phone number \_\_\_\_\_

Date of birth (dob/DoB)

Medical card number

PPS number

Your PPS is your **P**ersonal **P**ublic **S**ervice number which has replaced the old PRSI number.

The standard information health board forms ask for is listed below.

Health Board Area \_\_\_\_\_

APPLICANT'S NAME \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

TELEPHONE NUMBER

DATE OF BIRTH

MEDICAL CARD NO

PPS NUMBER

Signature of applicant \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Medical Person \_\_\_\_\_

For office use only \_\_\_\_\_



Forms give instructions on how the form has to be filled.

Write one letter in each box and leave spaces as appropriate

USE BLOCK CAPITALS

Use a black pen

M A R Y  S M I T H

It is also useful to practice filling in those details on a form. Some forms use boxes instead of lines - you put one letter or figure in each box. Here are some examples.

Gay Byrne is straightforward,

G A Y  B Y R N E

And so is Marian Finucane.

M A R I A N  F I N U C A N E

But when O' and Mc are part of a name it gets more difficult. Mary McAleese would write,

M A R Y  M C A L E E S E

And Sinéad O'Connor would write,

S I N É A D  O' C O N N O R

Try these

Your name

--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

Friends name

--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

\_\_\_\_\_

--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

\_\_\_\_\_

--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

\_\_\_\_\_

--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

\_\_\_\_\_

--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

## Dates

Dates can be written in different ways including boxes. The format is dd/mm/year which means day/month/year.

1 March 1957 =

0	1	0	3	1	9	5	7
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---

19 October 1964 =

0	9	1	0	6	4
---	---	---	---	---	---

Try these:

Your date of birth

--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

Today's date

--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

10 September 2001

--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

6 April 1975

--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

21 August 1999

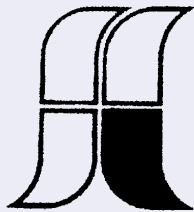
--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--



## Change of doctor form

This form is completed when the health board agrees that the patient can change doctor. The form is divided into two parts, one filled in by the patient and the other part filled in by the doctor.

List what steps the patient has to take before sending in the form, starting with who the patient contacts in the local health board.



South  
Eastern  
Health  
Board

Community Care Headquarters,  
James' Green,  
Kilkenny,  
Ireland.  
Telephone: (056) 52208  
Fax: (056) 64172

date

### **SOUTH EASTERN HEALTH BOARD**

I wish to change my choice of Doctor under the **Choice-of-Doctor Scheme**.  
Please arrange to transfer me and my dependants if appropriate to the panel  
of:-

Doctor: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ (Please use Block Capitals)

who has signed the "Doctor's Acceptance" part of this form, below.

Cardholder's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Card Register No: \_\_\_\_\_

Number of Persons Covered: \_\_\_\_\_  
-----

### **DOCTOR'S ACCEPTANCE FORM**

I agree to provide general practitioner services for the medical card holders  
named above (and his/her dependants if appropriate) in accordance with  
Section 63 of the Health Act, 1970.

DOCTOR'S SIGNATURE: \_\_\_\_\_ DOCTOR'S NAME  
AND ADDRESS

REGISTER NUMBERS: \_\_\_\_\_  
(Please use Block  
letters or rubber stamp)

THE APPLICANT LIVES \_\_\_\_\_ MILES FROM  
RESIDENCE \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

# Application for an eye test

Many forms use the medical name and not the familiar name. For example, the health board service which deals with “Eyes” is called the “Ophthalmic Services Scheme”. Many medical words are based on the Latin or Greek language. Words connected with eyes come from the Greek word optic, which means eye or vision. Have a look at these words:

Optician (ophthalmic optician) – the person who specialises in eyes

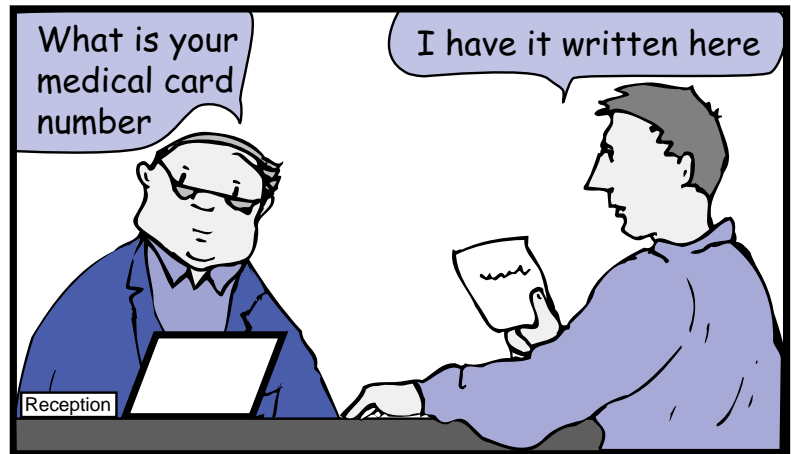
Optical – helping vision

Optical illusion – something we think we saw

HEALTH BOARD COMMUNITY OPHTHALMIC SERVICES SCHEME			
Application For Eye Examination/Optical Appliances			
<p>This Application applies to adult medical card holders and their adult dependants <b>who do not</b> qualify for Optical Benefit under the Department of Social Community and Family Affairs Optical Benefit Scheme.</p> <p><i>An applicant must not arrange to have an eye examination or to obtain glasses until Health Board approval has been received.</i></p> <p>Health Board _____</p>			
APPLICANT'S NAME _____			
ADDRESS _____ _____			
TELEPHONE NO <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/>		DATE OF BIRTH <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/>	
MEDICAL CARD NO <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/>		R.S.L. NO <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/>	
Do you use spectacles?	YES	NO	
Do you wish to have an eye examination?	YES	NO	
When did you last have an eye examination?			
If application is for replacement glasses please state when glasses were last supplied and reason for this application			
From which member on the Health Board panel do you wish to receive your eye examination/optical appliance?			
Optical Examiner		Optical Dispenser	
Signature of Applicant _____			
Signed for or on behalf of Optical Examiner/Dispenser _____			
FOR OFFICIAL USE			
Date Received	Authorised By	Date Authorised	

## Hospital Forms

Hospital patients are described as in-patients when they are staying in the hospital, and as out-patients when they are being treated in the hospital but staying at home. In both cases there are a lot for forms to be completed which contain personal details and medical information.



In nearly all cases the staff complete the forms on computer or by hand. Very often all the patient has to do is sign the forms. This is where your personal detail card could come in handy.

## Making appointments

It is a good idea to be prepared when phoning a hospital about an appointment.

- Look at the appointment card or letter and underline the phone number, the doctor's name and department.
- Your phone call might be answered by a voice recording, and you might have to choose a number to be put through to the department. Usually the last choice you're given is 0, for 'assistance' or the switch. Use that if you're stuck.
- Have a calendar in front of you that you can mark the date of your appointment on it.
- Ask whether you need to do anything in preparation for the visit, such as not eating, or bringing in medication you are taking.



## Appointment Cards

After your first visit you will be given an appointment card. Each hospital has its own card but the information is usually the same.

Its important to read the appointment card or letter thoroughly.

LEITRIM HOSPITAL 078-23456

### APPOINTMENTS

To avoid congestion please **DO NOT ATTEND BEFORE** the time of your appointment .

DATE	DAY	TIME	SPECIAL NOTES OR TESTS REQUIRED

THIS CARD MUST BE BROUGHT TO EVERY ATTENDANCE



Write

Read the appointment letter on the next page and fill in this appointment card.

This is a sample letter sent to parents about their child's operation.



List the things that the parent is being asked to do in preparation for her child's admission

Discuss

THIS NOTEPAPER MUST NOT BE USED FOR  
PRESCRIPTIONS OR INVOICING PURPOSES

Leitrim Hospital  
Co. Leitrim  
078 23456

15 September 2003

Ms. K. Daly,  
Main St.,  
Carrick-on-Shannon

No. 423956

Dear

An admission date has been arranged for your child on Monday 2nd October 2004 at 2pm under the care of Dr. Fiona Walsh.

Your child can have a light breakfast before 6.30am but please ensure that your child is fasting after this time. Please check into the Children's Ward between 10 – 10.30am.

**Please contact me on 1234567 to confirm this.**

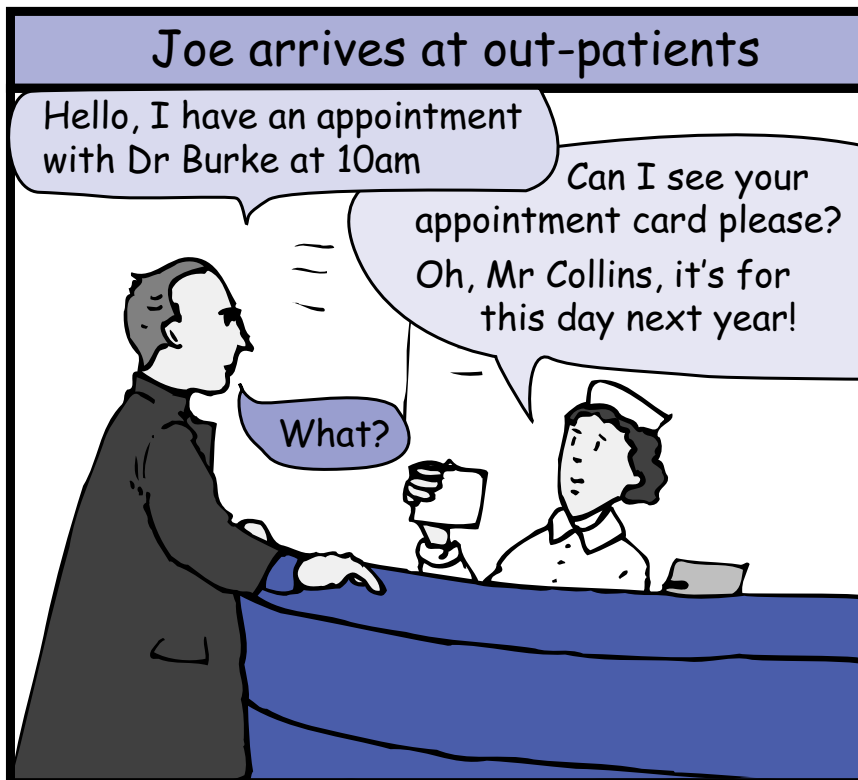
If this date is not suitable or you no longer require this surgery for your child please contact the hospital as soon as you receive this letter.

Please bring evidence of current entitlement to health services including medical card or any private health insurance scheme including cover type and subscriber number.

Yours sincerely

---

Secretary to Dr. Fiona Walsh



Joe has to wait a year to be seen. What advice do you have for Joe?

Would you advise doing any of the following?

Discuss

- Find out if there's a cancellation
- Contact your GP
- Contact a local representative
- Check options with CIC (Citizens Information Centre)
- Consider paying privately.

## Being an in-patient

When you are admitted as a patient there are lots of forms to be filled. Usually the staff ask a lot of questions and fill in the details on computer or write on the form. All your information is kept in a file which is kept at the end of the bed.

### Consent Form

A Consent Form is a form which the patient signs giving permission for the surgery or procedure to go ahead. Before signing, the doctor explains what the surgery will involve and what possible side effects there might be. Doctors also outline what complications can arise. Parents or guardians sign on behalf of children under 16 years.

Very often we sign forms without knowing exactly what we are signing and we often say we understand when maybe we don't. But it is important to ask questions and say you don't understand.

CONSENT FORM	
	Ward
<p>I ..... of ..... ..... hereby consent to *(undergo (the submission of my *(child. .... to undergo) (ward ..... ) the operation of ..... the nature and purpose of which have been explained to me by Dr./*Mr. ....</p> <p>I also consent to such further or alternative operative measures as may be found necessary during the course of the above-mentioned operation and to the administration of general, local or other anaesthetics for any of these purposes.</p> <p>No assurance has been given to me that the operation will be performed by any particular practitioner.</p> <p>Date ..... Signed ..... (PATIENT/PARENT/GUARDIAN/NEXT OF KIN)*</p> <p>Witness.....</p> <p>I confirm that I have explained the nature and purpose of this operation to the patient/ parent/guardian/next of kin*</p> <p>Date ..... Signed ..... (MEDICAL PRACTITIONER)</p> <p>*DELETE AS APPROPRIATE.</p> <p><b>ANY DELETIONS, INSERTIONS OR AMENDMENTS TO THE FORM ARE TO BE MADE BEFORE THE EXPLANATION IS GIVEN AND THE FORM SUBMITTED FOR SIGNATURE.</b></p>	

## Hospital Charters

Every hospital has a Patients Charter. These charters outline what patients have a right to expect when attending or staying in hospital.



Discuss

Ask the local hospital for a copy of their Hospital Charter and review how good it is. Write and tell them your views.

## Your medical records



Although there is no law on accessing medical records, GP's and hospital doctors generally allow patients access to their medical files on request.

The health services have a duty to maintain patients health records in confidence. They cannot show patient records to people outside unless the patient gives permission or if ordered by the courts. Medical records are considered to be the property of the GP or hospital and they will have a procedure which patients need to follow in order to see their records.

If for any reason a patient is not allowed to see their records, there are two pieces of legislation which could be used to gain access.

1. The Data Protection Act was introduced in 1988 which allows people to see personal information stored on computer. GP's and hospitals have a duty to show a patient their information and correct anything that is incorrect.
2. The Freedom of Information Act (FOI) was introduced in 1997 allowing people access to personal information held by public bodies. In relation to health, the Act applies to GPs if the patient has a medical card, health boards and voluntary hospitals but not private hospitals. There is a procedure to follow which starts by getting in contact with the local health board or the FOI office.

## Have all patients the same rights?

Children under 16 do not have the right to see their records but their parents can ask to see them. If for some reason they are not allowed, they can apply under the FOI. Adults who have a mental incapacity or are severely disabled are allowed to see their records provided that the relevant health professional thinks it is appropriate. In most cases they will ask that a health professional is present to help explain what the records mean.



## Keeping your own records

Keeping a health diary seems like a chore, but when it comes to health it can be the difference between getting the right treatment or not, and even between life and death. A healthy diary is a record of what is important to remember and know.

It's a very good way of accurately updating the doctor or nurse of how treatment is working or what changes you've noticed. It can also be very useful when someone else might be caring for the person when you're away.

This sample is a record which parents keep about their son's asthma. They use it for doctors visits and have also given a copy to their son's teacher. Everyone, including the babysitter, knows where it's kept in the house.

### Conor's Asthma Record

*Eileen and Tom's mobile 088 98765432  
Allergy to dog hair*

#### Treatment

*- started in April 2003  
green inhaler twice a day, morning and night  
blue inhaler when needed- only one puff*

Conor's symptoms - one or some of these;  
*wheezy, cough, pale and tired.*

Dealing with symptoms - *stop playing and  
take it easy, give inhaler if wheezy*

#### Check ups -

*Date*

*Changes in medication*

# Resource Material

This information will change by 2005

## Health Board website addresses:

North Western Health Board,  
Manorhamilton, Co. Leitrim  
Ph (071) 9820400  
Fax (071) 9820431  
[www.nwhb.ie](http://www.nwhb.ie)

Midland Health Board  
Administrative Headquarters,  
Arden Road, Tullamore,  
Co. Offaly.  
Ph (0506) 21868  
[www.mhb.ie](http://www.mhb.ie)

Western Health Board  
Administrative Headquarters,  
Merlin Park Regional Hospital,  
Galway  
Ph (091) 751131  
Fax (091) 752644  
[www.whb.ie](http://www.whb.ie)

Eastern Regional Health Authority (includes East  
Coast Area Health Board, Northern Area Health  
Board, South Western Area Health Board or  
Counties Dublin, Wicklow and Kildare.)  
Mill Lane,  
Palmerstown, Dublin 20  
Ph. 6201600  
Fax 6201601  
Web: [www.erha.ie](http://www.erha.ie)

North Eastern Health Board,  
Administrative Head Office,  
Kells, Co. Meath.

Mid-Western Health Board  
31.33 Catherine Street,  
Limerick  
Ph (061) 316655  
Fax (061) 483350  
[www.mwhb.ie](http://www.mwhb.ie)

Southern Health Board  
Administrative Headquarters,  
Wilton Road, Cork  
Ph (021) 4545011  
[www.shb.ie](http://www.shb.ie)

South Eastern Health Board  
Lacken, Dublin Road,  
Kilkenny  
Ph (056) 7784100  
Fax 056) 7784388  
[www.sehb.ie](http://www.sehb.ie)

# Resource Material

Resource	Suggested uses
<a href="http://www.oasis.gov.ie">www.oasis.gov.ie</a>	The OASIS (on-line access to services, information and support) website produces frontline information on public services for the use by the public. The information is displayed in life event order, for example grouped around child-birth, education, employment and bereavement.
<a href="http://www.welfare.ie/forms">www.welfare.ie/forms</a>	Website of the Department of Social and family Affairs. Forms can be downloaded from this site.
<b>Local hospitals</b>	Provide copies of consent forms, admission forms etc. for use as work sheets for students.
<b>Child Health Record</b> – Available from the Health Promotion Unit Department of Health and Children, Hawkins House, Dublin 2 Ph.: 6354000 Fax: 6354372 Web: <a href="http://www.healthpromotion.ie">www.healthpromotion.ie</a>	

# Healthcare Settings *Section 4*

## Aim

To have an understanding of the health system and develop skills which increase confidence in communicating with healthcare staff.

## Objectives

- Know what services are available at local level and how to access them.
- Reflect on communications and behaviour when talking to health practitioners.
- Explore ways to communicate effectively with health practitioners.
- Recognise hospital signage and regularly used medical language.

## Contents

■ Healthcare at local level	69
■ Personal reflection: How comfortable are you in talking to the doctor?	70
■ Visiting the doctor's surgery	71
■ Finding your way in a hospital	76
■ Hospital visits	78
■ Resource material	79

## How to use this section

Use whichever of the activities in this section suit your group. You might also want to consider other activities such as:

- Explore why so many people find it difficult to assert themselves in healthcare settings.

- How does this compare with other situations, the teacher, your boss, others in authority.
- Use humorous role play to exaggerate the doctor/patient relationship.
- Look at doctor/patient visits from the doctors perspective and what makes it difficult to treat some patients.
- Use medical tv programmes to discuss the styles of different healthcare staff.
- Identify personal difficulties in talking to the doctor and look at ways to overcome them.
- Use the local hospital as an example and look at the signage and department names and devise ways of recognising words.
- Design a visitor friendly hospital signage board and send it the local hospital for their views.
- Discuss queueing systems and how they work or don't work.

## Keywords

GP	consultant	surgeon	specialist
symptoms	family history	scan	procedure
diagnosis	prognosis	departments	ICU
routine	admitted	cancellation	elective

# Healthcare at local level

Health boards provide a range of healthcare services under two categories. One is primary healthcare, which is based in the community and the other is hospital healthcare.

Primary healthcare staff are involved in promoting good health and preventing illnesses as well as the treatment of illnesses which don't require hospital care. They include:

occupational therapists	community nurses	care assistants	physiotherapists
health promotion officers	social workers	physiologists	GP's
alternative medicine	home helps	dentists	

There are a lot fewer hospitals than surgeries and clinics, and people often have to travel quite a distance for hospital treatment. Hospital care is either emergency or elective. Elective treatments are hospital stays that are planned in advance and people awaiting treatment go on a waiting list.

## Your local services



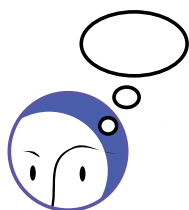
Make a list of all the health care services in your area. If there isn't already a local directory you could think about making one. You could simply make a list or divide into sections for certain group such as older people, pregnant women, families and so on.

Check with the GP, dentist, chemist, the hospital, health board and public health nurse, support and counselling services, Citizens Information Centres, addiction services, mental health groups to see what is available and what they offer.



Computer

This could be a useful project and would involve using a range of skills such as computers, information finding, communications and organisational skills. It might be worth checking if the project could be shared with another tutor such as the computers or communications tutor. There could be lots of benefits like producing a better directory and maybe even progressing the FETAC portfolios.



Have a look at the list below.

Tick the box which describes you best

Reflect

	I.....	yes	sometimes	no
1	feel relaxed before a doctors appointment			
2	find my doctor is easy to talk to			
3	am embarrassed to talk about certain things			
4	always forget to mention something			
5	usually leave satisfied			
6	understand everything my doctor is saying			
7	explain my symptoms clearly			
8	find it difficult to ask questions			
9	feel like the customer getting a service			
10	find it easier to talk to the receptionist or nurse than the doctor			
11	say I understand when I don't			
12	would feel comfortable to disagree with the doctor			
13	get annoyed when the doctor suggests I make changes in my lifestyle			
14	find myself more timid than normal			
15	interrupt if I don't understand			
16	feel I'm taking up the doctors time			

# Visiting the doctor's surgery

Most people agree that they behave differently when talking to a doctor. People talk about feeling less confident and quieter or not saying what they had planned.

One reason why this can happen is because doctors use medical language. Years of medical training results in doctors using a language which can be alien to many patients. Doctors are often unaware of how alien their language is and can overestimate how much patients understand. The greater the gap between the doctors and patients language, the greater the likelihood that the patient feels uncomfortable or powerless.



Have a look at this list and discuss whether you agree or disagree with the statements.

## Discuss

### GP's

Use medical jargon which they don't explain.

Make assumptions that the patient understands.

Always take into account the patients personal circumstances.

Become impatient when the patient finds it difficult to explain their symptoms.

Get frustrated that the patient doesn't take responsibility for their health.

Often do more than treat medical problems.

### Patients

Are embarrassed to talk about certain conditions.

Do not understanding what the GP is saying.

Do not have the vocabulary to explain their symptoms clearly.

Often go to the GP when there's no need.

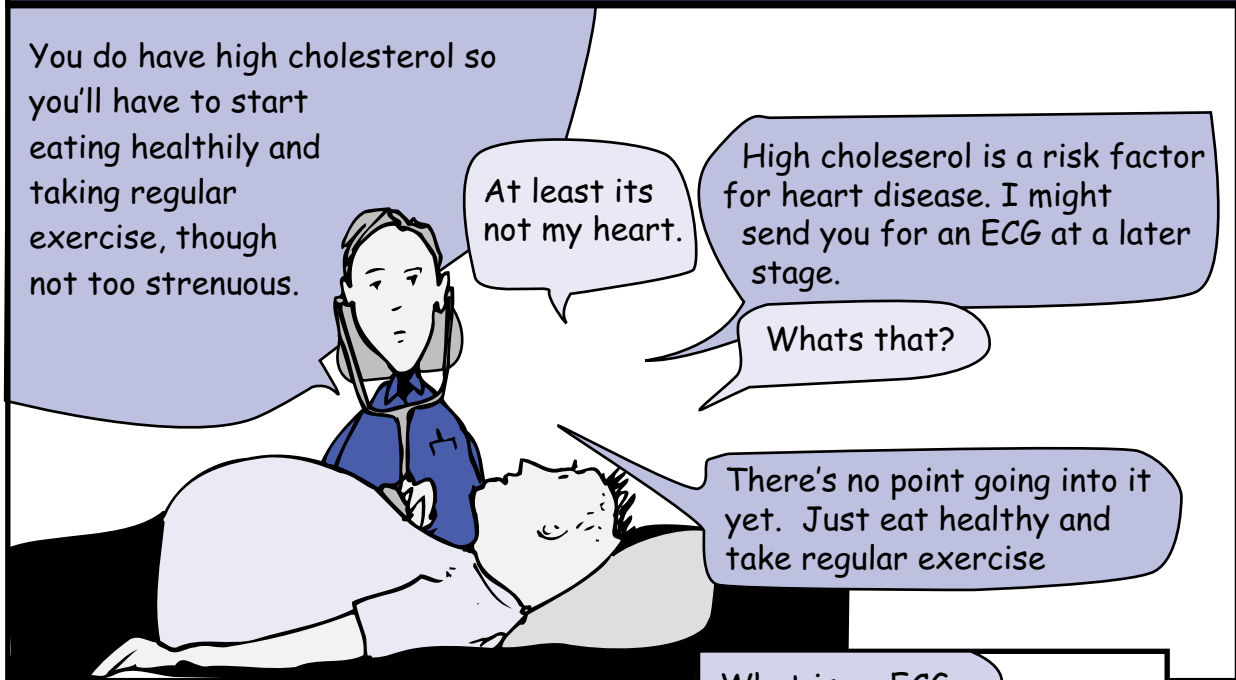
Do not want to waste the GP's time.

Are reluctant to make lifestyle changes which the GP suggests.

In recent years the medical profession has introduced various measures to improve the relationship between patients and medical staff and the health system, such as staff training and patient charters. While this is certainly a good thing, it does not necessarily ensure that patients become more pro-active in their healthcare. It is usually the doctor who enables and encourages the patient to become more involved by creating a safe and non-threatening environment for dialogue to happen. This starts by putting patients at ease by talking to them in a language they understand. As in all relationships, people begin to engage when they feel listened to and believe that they will benefit by communicating.



## Joe went to the doctor with pains in his chest



Discuss

How would you advise the doctor and Joe on communicating better?

## Preparing for a visit

Healthcare settings can be intimidating places when you are not used to them and particularly so when a person is ill and feeling more vulnerable than normal. This is compounded further when the patient has a literacy problem as well. Although healthcare staff play a key role in creating an environment where patients feel comfortable communicating, patients can also take steps such as:

- ⇒ Finding out what to expect within the healthcare setting and anticipating what the experience might involve.
- ⇒ Preparing for the visit in advance by being able to explain symptoms and bringing along any medication they are taking.
- ⇒ Being prepared to ask questions and answer questions.

## In the hospital

- In the hospital you'll be asked a lot of questions by lots of different staff and maybe even have to answer the same things more than once. Because it's your first time in the hospital they'll ask you personal questions about your family's health, what you work at, what religion you are. They want as much information as possible to make sure they give you the right treatment.
- The doctors and nurses work together to treat you and they will keep asking you questions and writing things on your chart. That's so they can keep up to date, keep track of your treatment and make sure that when shifts change, everything is up to date.
- Doctors and nurses want you to ask questions and tell them when you don't understand something. They have no way of knowing that you don't understand unless you tell them. It saves a lot of time and also worry on your part.
- Always ask what you need to do when you've being discharged. Explain what your normal routine is and ask when you can drive, what you should eat, when you can go back to work and so on. Also, ask how long it will be before you're back to normal and if there are any side effects you need to be aware of.

## Referrals

While many people are familiar with visiting the GP, referrals to others services can cause anxiety. Patients worry that they may have something serious. They are anxious about having to go somewhere new. They often have to wait for appointments and results.

Understanding how the system works can help reduce some of these concerns and many questions can be answered by primary healthcare staff. Healthcare staff and patients sometimes make assumptions about what is understood. For example an appointment for an X-Ray could be an MRI scan which is a very different experience than the conventional X-Ray.

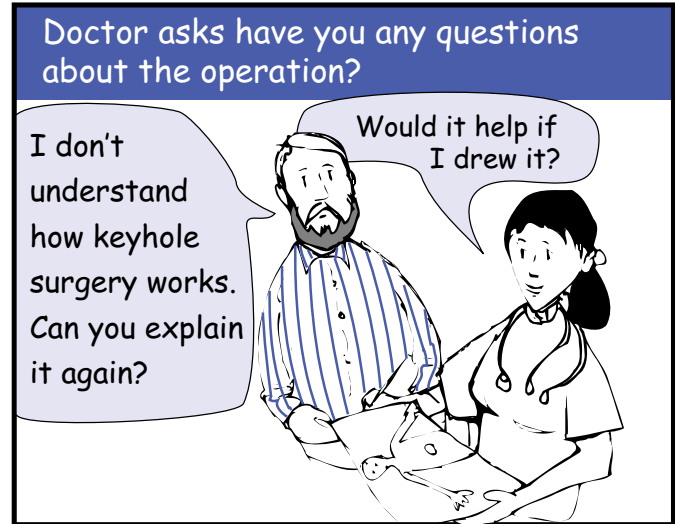
Preparation can make the experience easier. Ask the doctor what can you expect. This is a sample of what a doctor can explain before a patient goes into hospital.



List

Telling the doctor or nurse that you don't understand something is important but not always easy to do. Ask the group to come up with things that a patient could say that would help, for example;

- Can you explain that to me again please?
- I don't understand what that means?
- Sorry to interrupt, but I don't understand what you're saying.
- Could you draw that for me?
- How would that affect me?
- What does regular mean?
- I'd like to try physiotherapy



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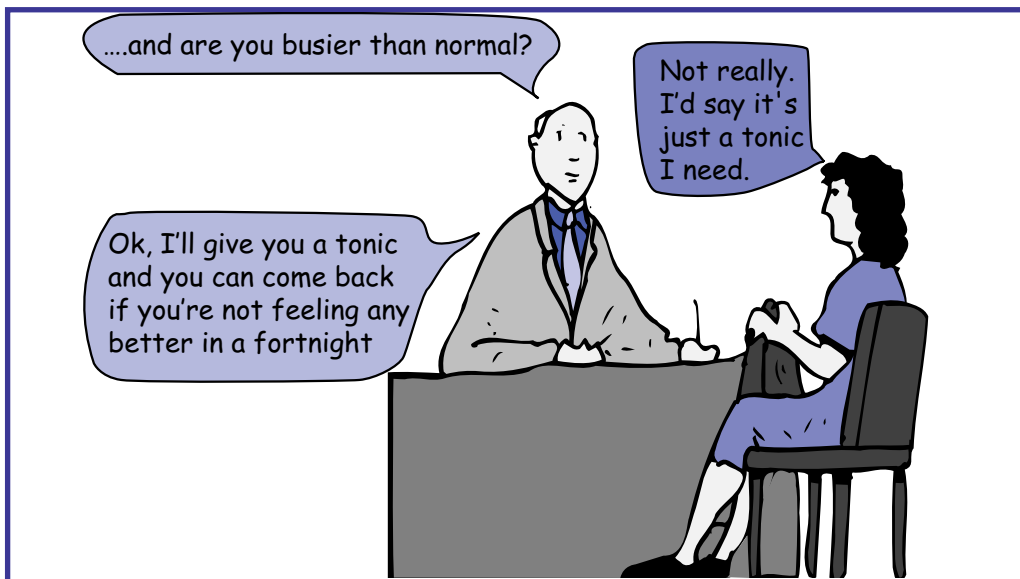
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## Cathy's visit to the doctor

Cathy hasn't been feeling well for the last couple of months. She's had a hectic time looking after her mother since she got out of hospital. She decides to go to the doctor for a tonic.



What other information could Cathy have given and what questions could the doctor have asked?

Discuss

It's worth checking what entitlements are available when someone gets sick.

Depending on Cathy's mother's circumstances, she may have been entitled to a home help, a grant to make changes to her house and/or health board transport. Cathy may be eligible for a carers allowance.



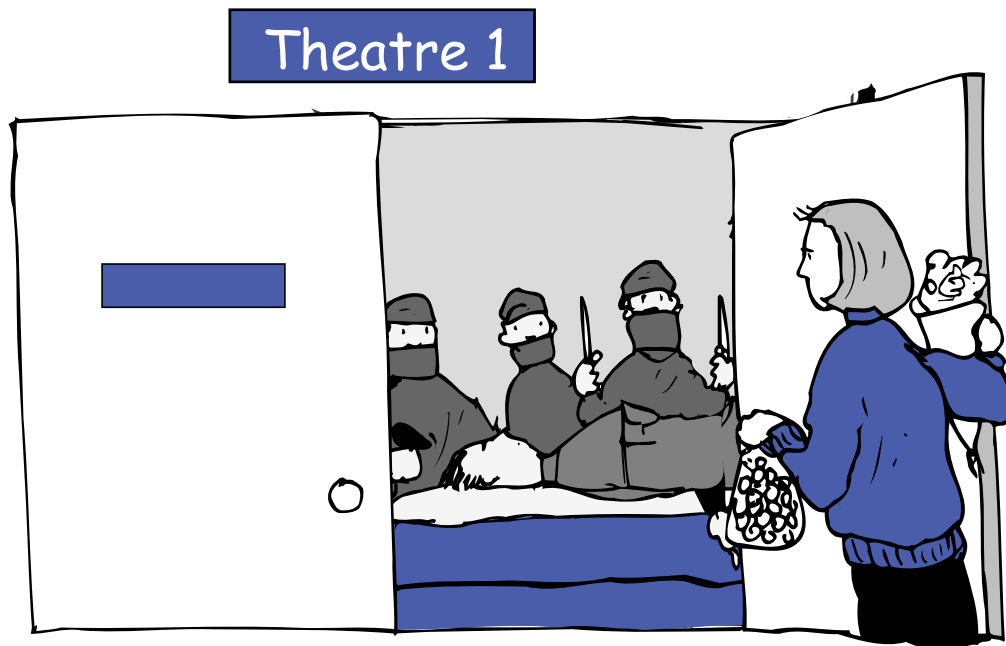
Try these role plays

Role play

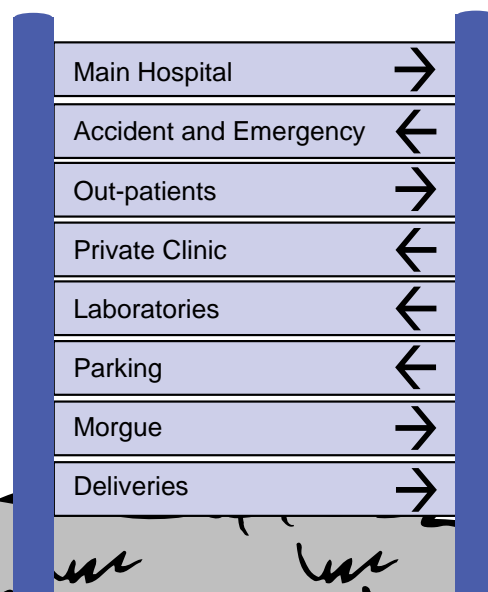
<p><b>Doctor</b></p> <p>You've seen Mick three times in two months. He won't stop smoking and he's got asthma.</p>	<p><b>Mick</b></p> <p>You've got little else except the cigarettes and you just can't give them up. You don't want a lecture.</p>
<p><b>Doctor</b></p> <p>There's nothing wrong with Una except she reads too many health scare stories and always thinks she's got it. She's beginning to take up too much time.</p>	<p><b>Una</b></p> <p>You read in a magazine that headaches can be a sign of something serious. To be sure you go to the doctor.</p>

# Finding your way in a hospital

Finding your way in a hospital can be confusing. It can be made easier with good signage.



Whether an in-patient, out-patient or simply visiting a patient, all hospitals have a lot of signs to help people get to where they want to get to. The first signs are often in the drive-way up to the hospital.



Once inside the hospital there are usually at least two sets of signs in the main lobby, one directing people to the wards and the other to departments within the hospital. The names can be difficult to say and read.

## Wards

Most wards have names, usually called after people or saints. However, some wards use the medical name.

I.C.U. = Intensive Care Unit

Neurology = Head

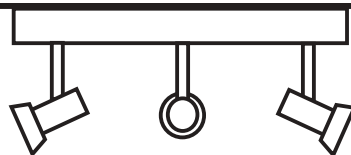
Pediatric Ward = Children's Ward

Antenatal = Before birth

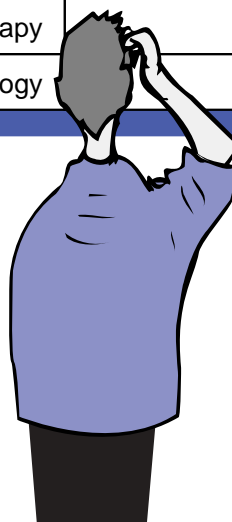
G.I. = Gastro Intestinal (stomach)

Cardiac = Heart

## Hospital Signage



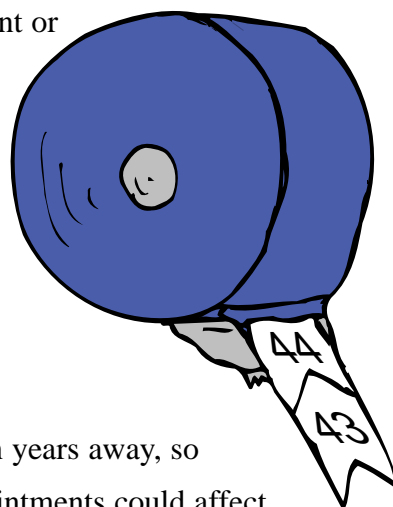
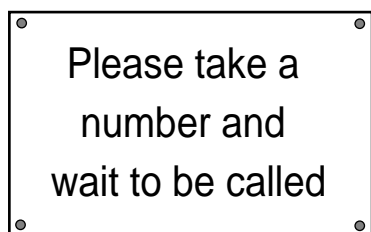
↓	Audiology	Accounts	←
↑	Language and Speech Therapy	Admissions	←
↑	Occupational Therapy	Bank	↑
←	Accident and Emergency	Coffee Shop	↑
↓	Cardiac	Information	←
→	Dietic Department	Prayer Room	↓
→	Eye Clinic	Shop	→
↓	Haematology		↑
↑	GI Unit		↑
←	Intensive Therapy Unit		←
↓	Theatre- Operating Rooms		↓
←	Physiotherapy		→
↑	Rheumatology		↓



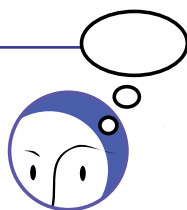
# Hospital visits

## ..... as a patient

Each hospital has a system for patients checking in for an appointment or being admitted. In most hospitals patients have to join a queue. One of the queuing systems used is the *ticket number*.



People can be given hospital appointments which are months or even years away, so missing an appointment can mean even further delays. Missing appointments could affect patient health and will certainly annoy the staff.



Reflect

Think of as many ways as possible to remember appointment dates

## ..... as a visitor

Visiting someone in hospital usually takes some organising so it's worth checking out a few things before setting off, starting with finding out if the person is still there!



Write



List



Find out

Make a list of things to find out in advance

# Resource Material

Visit local hospital websites

Ask local hospitals for copies of their Patient Charters.

Anseo: English for Living in Ireland.

Module 1: Health

Available from NALA, cost €20

Produced by: Integrate Ireland Language and Training (iilt)

Tel: 01 – 6775344



# General Resource Material

**Doak CC., Doak LG., Root JH., (1995) Teaching Patients With Low Literacy Skills, 2<sup>nd</sup> Addition** Philadelphia: JB Lippincott Company

Health Promotion Unit - (01) 6364000 [www.healthpromotion.ie](http://www.healthpromotion.ie)

**Writing effective health information materials** – Guidelines on writing and design techniques (2003)

Wide selection of resource materials available

National Adult Literacy Agency - (01) 8554332 [www.nala.ie](http://www.nala.ie)

Ann McCarthy (2002) **Health Literacy Policy and Strategy Report**

NALA **Writing and Design Tips** (1999)

## Websites

NALA Literacy Tools Website [www.nala.ie](http://www.nala.ie)

Basic Skills [www.basicskills.ie](http://www.basicskills.ie)

Health Boards see Resource Material in Section 3

VHI [www.vhi.ie](http://www.vhi.ie)

Oasis [www.oasis.gov.ie](http://www.oasis.gov.ie)

Doctor Patient Partnerships <http://www.dpp.org.uk>

Health Literacy <http://www.healthliteracy.com>

Health Literacy Studies,

Harvard School of Public Health <http://www.hsph.harvard.edu/healthliteracy>

## Appendix 1 – Medical Terms

Medical Word	Everyday Word/Explanation	Example
Doctor or Physician	Doctor who treats patients with drugs	Respiratory Physician is a doctor who specialises in diseases of the lungs
Surgeon	A doctor who has specialised in doing operations/performing surgery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cardiac Surgeon specialises in heart operations</li> <li>• Paediatric Cardiac Surgeon specialises in doing operations on the heart in children</li> </ul>
Diagnosis	Tells you what illness you have	“You have been diagnosed with arthritis”
Prognosis	Tells you the likely course of your illness/ A forecast	<p>“The prognosis is good/ bad”</p> <p>“The prognosis is that you can lead a normal life but will have to take medication to control your symptoms”</p>
Chronic Illness	A long-term or persistent illness	Chronic Back pain
Acute Illness	A short-term or sudden illness	Acute Asthma attack
Screening test	A test used to check a large number of people for an illness	Mammogram for breast cancer
ENT	Ear/Nose/Throat	ENT Specialist
Therapy	Treatment	Radiotherapy, Chemotherapy, Physiotherapy

Part of body	Special area of medicine - ology	Pronunciation	Name of Doctor/Specialist ologist	Example of illness - itis
Heart	Cardiology	Car-dee-ol-o-gee	Cardiologist	Carditis
Skin	Dermatology	Der-mat-ol-o-gee	Dermatologist	Dermatitis
Joints	Rheumatology	Room-at-ol-o-gee	Rheumatologist	Arthritis
Digestive System(stomach etc.)	Gastroenterology	Gas-tro-ent-er-ol-o-gee	Gastroenterologist	Gastroenteritis
Diabetes/Hormones	Endocrinology	N-doh-krin-ol-o-gee	Endocrinologist	Diabetes
Tumour/Cancer	Oncology	On-kol-o-gee	Oncologist	Cancer/tumour Malignancy
Kidneys	Urology	U-rol-o-gee	Urologist	Urethritis
Lungs	Respiratory	Res-pir-a-tor-ee	Respiratory Physician	Bronchitis
	Medicine			
Children's illnesses	Paediatrics	Peed-e-at-rics	Paediatrician	Diseases in Children eg. Paediatric Diabetes

-itis at the end of a word means inflammation of e.g. dermatitis = inflammation of the skin

Medical Word	Everyday Word/Explanation	Example
Symptoms	Signs of a sickness	Headache can be a symptom of high blood pressure
Malignant	Harmful/ tending to spread to many parts of the body	Malignant breast cancer
Benign	Not malignant / doesn't spread throughout the body	Benign tumour in the breast
Procedure	Something done to treat your problem, such as an operation	"There is a simple procedure that will fix that"
Monitor	Keep track of	"We will need to monitor your heart to make sure everything is ok"
Normal range	"Where it should be", common amount	"Your blood pressure is within the normal range"
Hypertension	High blood pressure	Hypertension is a risk factor for heart disease
Associated with	Goes along with	Osteoporosis is associated with an higher risk of fracture as you get older
Prosthesis	Replacement for a body part	"We will remove the damaged joint and put in a prosthesis instead" (eg. hip replacement)













## What is the health pack?

This is a health resource pack for literacy tutors and health practitioners. The pack can help address some of the difficulties people experience when they deal with health issues and systems. The pack is intended as a resource for you to use and adapt to suit your group. The topics covered include Being Healthy, Taking Medication, Filling Out Medical Forms and Healthcare Settings.

## What is NALA?

The National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) is a non-profit membership organisation, concerned with national co-ordination, training and policy development in adult literacy work in Ireland. The Agency was established in 1980 and from that time has campaigned for recognition and response to the adult literacy problem in Ireland.



**NALA**

**National Adult Literacy Agency**

**An Áisíneacht Náisiúnta Litearthachta do Aosaigh**

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