

## Lesson Plan: Asking About Pain

### Teacher Notes

**Topic:** Asking About Pain

**Timing:** 60-90 minutes

**Lesson Type/Focus:** mixed - vocabulary development, grammar consolidation, listening and speaking skills development

**Aims:**

- **Vocabulary:** learn and practise language for describing and asking about pain
- **Listening:** improve listening skills for gist and detail
- **Grammar:** improve ability to use different question types
- **Speaking:** improve clinical speaking skills through role play

### Overview

The focus topic of this lesson is describing and asking about pain. Students' existing vocabulary is activated with a short vocabulary discussion, after which a dialogue is used first to practise listening for gist and detail and then as the basis of a gap-fill. Language from the dialogue is then exploited in the second vocabulary activity, which expands to elicit a range of language to talk about pain. Different question types, as demonstrated in the dialogue, are explored in the next activity before a role play between a nurse and a patient closes the lesson by giving practice with language from all the previous activities.

**Note:** while this lesson plan works as an independent plan, it also supports the language introduced in the following:

- Course: [Online English for Nurses: Getting the Essentials Right](#)'.
- Unit: Discussing Pain
- Module: Asking about pain 1

## Teaching Guide & Answer Key

### Part 1: vocabulary 1

#### Section A

- Write up the words *pain*, *hurt* and *ache* and ask the class for an example sentence using each one. You may want to check the pronunciation of *ache* (/eɪk/) at this point. Note any variation in word form, e.g. *hurts*, *aching* and elicit other members of the word families, e.g. *painful*.
- Put students into pairs and give them a few minutes to think of sentences. Then ask for feedback to class and discuss where appropriate, e.g. to correct.

#### Section B

- Now ask students to think of words for specific pains, e.g. headache, neuralgia. They should make a list in their pairs.
- In turn, ask each pair to say an item from their list. Check their pronunciation, then make a master list for the class.

#### Suggested answers

*headache, toothache, backache, earache, neuralgia, fibromyalgia, heartburn, sore throat, cramp, indigestion, period pain, migraine*

### Part 2: listening

#### Section A: listening for gist

- Direct students to the first set of questions and check students understand them.
- Play the recording from the conversation between the nurse and the patient once and give pairs/groups a moment to confer and make some notes on the answers.
- Check answers through class feedback.

### Suggested answers

1. Which part of the patient's body hurts? Why?  
*His lower back; he hurt it in a bike accident.*
2. Has he had the pain for a long or a short time?  
*A long time (he says "for years").*
3. What kind of movements have an effect on the patient's pain?  
*Sudden movements and lifting heavy objects.*
4. How does the pain affect his life?  
*He has trouble getting comfortable. It sounds like it's also affecting his ability to sleep.*

### Section B: listening for detail

- Now ask students to read through the dialogue transcript and imagine what the missing words are.

Encourage them to analyse the transcript and discuss the meaning and structure of the missing language. This is an opportunity to practise varying levels of focus: reading the whole conversation without worrying about the gaps will give a general idea of the topic, while looking at a shorter section will give clues as to the meaning or function of the missing statement and concentrating on the grammar of a single line may indicate the type of language needed to fill the gap.

### Section C

- Ask the class to study the phrases below the dialogue and try to fit them into the spaces. Ask them to compare them with the answers they thought of.
- Play the video/audio recording so they can check their ideas and change them where necessary. This is in the course: [Online English for Nurses: Getting the Essentials Right](#), as indicated above, or is available [here](#).
- Use whole class feedback to check the correct answers.

### Answers

**Nurse:** *Hi William. How are you (1) today?*

**Patient:** *Oh. I'm OK apart from this pain. I just can't get comfortable.*

**Nurse:** *Oh right. Is it OK if I ask you some questions (2) about the pain?*

- Patient:** *Yeah, sure.*
- Nurse:** *First, can you tell me (3) where the pain is?*
- Patient:** *It's in my lower back. Right here at the base of the spine. I had a bike accident a few years ago and hurt my back and my right hip.*
- Nurse:** *I see. So, is the pain in your back (4) and your hip?*
- Patient:** *No, I've only got back pain now. My hip's OK. But I've had back pain for years now.*
- Nurse:** *What (5) type of pain is it?*
- Patient:** *I'm sorry, I don't understand what you mean. It's back pain.*
- Nurse:** *Yes, I understand but I was trying to find out if (6) it's a sharp pain or a dull ache. If you have a sharp pain, it is usually a (7) short-term pain, whereas a (8) dull ache can be a type of (9) chronic pain.*
- Patient:** *Oh right. I understand what you're asking now. It's mostly a dull ache, except if I move suddenly or try to pick up something heavy. Then I get a sharp pain.*
- Nurse:** *You said your back (10) is hurting now, right?*
- Patient:** *Yes, it's quite painful. I couldn't stay in bed any longer.*

## Part 3: vocabulary 2

### Section A

- Now the class has the complete conversation, ask them, in pairs/small groups, to look at it for a moment and find different ways in which the nurse and the patient describe pain.
- Direct them to the definitions in this activity and explain that they follow the order of the conversation. Give them a few minutes to find the answers, then elicit the answers.

### Answers

1. sit or lie down without feeling pain *get comfortable*
2. pain that is severe but lasts only a short time *sharp pain*
3. pain that is not severe but lasts a long time *dull ache*
4. any type of pain that lasts for a short time *short-term pain*
5. any type of pain that lasts for a long time *chronic pain*

## Section B

- Point out that *sharp* and *dull* describe the way pain feels, while *short-term* and *chronic* describe how long pain lasts.
- State that there is also language for how strong pain is and the effect it has. As part of this, draw students' attention to the table and ask for definitions of the examples given (*e.g. stabbing: pain that feels like a knife in the body; shooting: pain that moves quickly; severe/mild*).
- Put students into pairs or small groups and ask them to add more examples to the table. Allow dictionary use if useful.
- Feedback with the whole class.

### Suggested answers

feeling	strong/weak	effect
stabbing	severe	sickening
shooting	mild	exhausting
<i>burning</i>	<i>minor</i>	<i>nagging</i>
<i>throbbing</i>	<i>manageable</i>	<i>annoying</i>
<i>itching</i>	<i>moderate</i>	<i>distracting</i>
<i>radiating</i>	<i>intense</i>	<i>blinding</i>
<i>cramping</i>	<i>excruciating</i>	<i>incapacitating</i>

### Note

Some of the vocabulary here is quite advanced, so you could introduce an extension activity focusing on meaning and pronunciation.

## Part 4: question types

### Section A

- Direct students to the dialogue and ask them to find the four questions in this exercise and to notice how the patient responds to them.
- In pairs or small groups, ask students to do the activity.

- Feedback with the whole class, asking how they decided on their answers.

### Answers

1. What type of pain is it?  
*Asking for a short, simple answer (b)*
2. Is it OK if I ask you some questions about the pain?  
*Asking for permission or consent (a)*
3. Can you tell me where the pain is?  
*Asking for a longer, more complex answer (d)*
4. You said your back is hurting now, right?  
*Checking you understand what the other person said (c)*

### Note

This is a good time to revise the difference between direct questions (1), indirect questions (2, 3) and questions in the form of statements (4).

Important concepts here are the inversion of subject and verb in question forms (i.e. *What type of pain is it?* rather than *What type of pain it is?*), the use of the positive rather than the question form in indirect questions (i.e. *Can you tell me where the pain is?* rather than *Can you tell me where is the pain?*) and the significance of intonation when a question is in the form of a statement (i.e. how the voice rises on *right?* in question 4).

### Section B

When students seem comfortable with the question types, direct them to the next part of the activity, which contains two more examples of each type. Give them time to analyse the form of the questions and find similarities with the previous exercise before reviewing with the whole class.

### Answers

- a. *Asking for permission or consent: 1, 6*
- b. *Asking for a short, simple answer: 2, 5*
- c. *Checking you understand what the other person said: 4, 8*
- d. *Asking for a longer, more complex answer: 3, 7*

## Section C

Ask students to look at the question endings a-h and explain that they will need to think about both meaning and structure to match them with the beginnings 1-8.

### Suggested answers

1. <i>Do you mind if I suggest...</i>	<i>...some alternative therapies?</i>
2. <i>Where does...</i>	<i>...it hurt most?</i> <i>...the pain begin?<sup>1</sup></i>
3. <i>Could you explain...</i>	<i>...how the accident happened?</i>
4. <i>Do you mean...</i>	<i>...you can't feel anything at all?</i>
5. <i>When did...</i>	<i>...it hurt most?</i> <i>...the pain begin?</i>
6. <i>Would it be alright if I asked...</i>	<i>...you about your lifestyle habits?</i>
7. <i>Why don't we discuss...</i>	<i>...some alternative therapies?</i> <i>...how the accident happened?</i>
8. <i>Are you saying...</i>	<i>...you can't feel anything at all?</i>

<sup>1</sup> In this context, the question is not about time but about the location of a shooting or spreading pain.

## Section D

Encourage discussion and creativity as students think of new question endings, reminding them to refer to the structure of the answers to the last exercise if they need guidance.

### Part 5: role play

- Explain that all of the language used so far in the lesson can be included in the role play: the different forms of *pain*, *hurt* and *ache*, specific language for local

pain, ways to talk about the quality, duration and effect of pain and appropriate questions to ask about a patient's pain.

- Give pairs a few minutes to prepare before starting the role play. Nurses should think of questions they can ask to find out more about the pain the patient is experiencing and patients should think about the type of pain they have, how long it's lasted and how it affects their life. Encourage a range of language to describe the cause of the pain (accident, illness, chronic condition) as well as incorporating words and phrases from previous exercises.
- Circulate as pairs do the activity, noting good use of language or instructive errors and allowing them to complete conversations naturally, including discussion of treatment or lifestyle advice if these topics arise. When they finish their first conversation, ask them to swap roles and prepare for a new conversation.
- Feedback, drawing attention to anything you noted during the activity. If willing, some pairs could perform their conversations for the class.



## Student Worksheet: Asking About Pain



### Part 1: vocabulary 1

- A. Make sentences using the words *pain*, *hurt* and *ache* and other members of the same word families (e.g. *painful*, *hurting*). Include a part of the body where necessary.

*"I'm in a lot of pain"*

*"Her wrist is aching"*

- B. Think of some words that describe pain in particular parts of the body. They might be everyday words like *headache* or clinical words like *neuralgia*.

### Part 2: listening

- A. You're going to hear a conversation between a nurse and a patient who is in pain. The first time you listen, answer these questions about the conversation:
1. Which part of the patient's body hurts? Why?
  2. Has he had the pain for a long or a short time?

3. What kind of movements have an effect on the patient's pain?
4. How does the pain affect his life?

B. Now look at the dialogue and think of some words and phrases that could fill the gaps. Consider the grammar of the sentence as well as the type of information you need.

**Nurse:** Hi William. How are you (1)\_\_\_\_\_?

**Patient:** Oh. I'm OK apart from this pain. I just can't get comfortable.

**Nurse:** Oh right. Is it OK if I ask you some questions (2)\_\_\_\_\_?

**Patient:** Yeah, sure.

**Nurse:** First, can you tell me (3)\_\_\_\_\_?

**Patient:** It's in my lower back. Right here at the base of the spine. I had a bike accident a few years ago and hurt my back and my right hip.

**Nurse:** I see. So, is the pain in your back (4)\_\_\_\_\_?

**Patient:** No, I've only got back pain now. My hip's OK. But I've had back pain for years now.

**Nurse:** What (5)\_\_\_\_\_ is it?

**Patient:** I'm sorry, I don't understand what you mean. It's back pain.

**Nurse:** Yes, I understand but I was trying to find out if (6)\_\_\_\_\_ or a dull ache. If you have a sharp pain, it is usually a (7)\_\_\_\_\_, whereas a (8)\_\_\_\_\_ can be a type of (9)\_\_\_\_\_ pain.

**Patient:** Oh right. I understand what you're asking now. It's mostly a dull ache, except if I move suddenly or try to pick up something heavy. Then I get a sharp pain.

**Nurse:** You said your back (10)\_\_\_\_\_ now, right?

**Patient:** Yes, it's quite painful. I couldn't stay in bed any longer.

C. Now use these words and phrases to fill the gaps. Are any of them similar to your ideas from the last activity?

chronic  
hurting

type of pain

today

is

about the pain  
dull ache

it's a sharp pain

and your hip

where the pain is

short-term pain

Listen again to check your answers.

**Part 3: vocabulary 2**

A. Look at the completed conversation from the last exercise and find words and phrases with these meanings:

- 1. sit or lie down without feeling pain \_\_\_\_\_
- 2. pain that is severe but lasts only a short time \_\_\_\_\_
- 3. pain that is not severe but lasts a long time \_\_\_\_\_
- 4. any type of pain that lasts for a short time \_\_\_\_\_
- 5. any type of pain that lasts for a long time \_\_\_\_\_

B. Make a list of other language for describing pain. Think about how it feels, how strong or weak it is and how it affects people. There are some examples in the table below.

feeling	strong/weak	effect
stabbing shooting	severe mild	sickening exhausting

**Part 4: question types**

A. Look at four questions from the conversation in Part 2 and match each one with a purpose from a-d.

- 1. What type of pain is it?
- 2. Is it OK if I ask you some questions about the pain?
- 3. Can you tell me where the pain is?
- 4. You said your back is hurting now, right?

- a. Asking for permission or consent
- b. Asking for a short, simple answer
- c. Checking you understand what the other person said
- d. Asking for a longer, more complex answer

B. Now match these question beginnings with the same purposes:

1. Do you mind if I suggest...?
2. Where does...?
3. Could you explain...?
4. Do you mean...?
5. When did...?
6. Would it be alright if I asked...?
7. Why don't we discuss...?
8. Are you saying...?

C. Decide which ending below goes with each of the beginnings above. More than one answer may be possible in some cases.

- a. ...it hurt most?
- b. ...the pain begin?
- c. ...a sort of throbbing pain?
- d. ...the possible treatments?
- e. ...some alternative therapies?
- f. ...how the accident happened?
- g. ...you can't feel anything at all?
- h. ...you about your lifestyle habits?

D. Think of some more things you can ask about by inventing new endings for questions 1-8.

## Part 5: role play

In pairs, play the roles of a nurse and a patient who is in pain. As the patient, decide where the pain is, how long it has lasted and how it feels. As the nurse, think of some questions you can ask to find out more about the pain and some treatments you can recommend. Use language that you have practised in this lesson to have a short (2-3 minutes) conversation.

Swap roles so each of you has the opportunity to be the nurse and the patient.

