

Teacher's slide – guidance on physical health

This lesson covers the ways in which students can take responsibility for their physical health. This slide gives a brief guide for teachers for handling these topics sensitively.

The key message of this lesson is that students can seek medical treatment if they're worried about their health. It is especially important for students living in abusive households to know that they can seek medical treatment or advice without an abuser's knowledge or permission (e.g. in the UK, parental permission is not required for a GP appointment). If you have any concerns, speak to your safeguarding lead.

Avoid shaming or judging students for their anxieties or fears. There may be a variety of reasons that young people are reluctant to use healthcare services. Some of these reasons may seem trivial to adults (for example, fear of speaking on the telephone to make an appointment). Try to listen to their reasons without judgement and allow them to explore ways to overcome barriers to these issues themselves, rather than telling them how they "should" think or feel.

Be aware that there are a range of barriers to accessing healthcare. These may include: problems identifying symptoms, not wanting to be a burden, feeling like the issue is not serious enough to warrant an appointment, previous negative experiences, not being registered with a GP practice, transport issues, or mental health issues (e.g. anxiety about entering a busy waiting room, dealing with an unfamiliar process or speaking to an unfamiliar person). Allow students to explore ways in which others could overcome these barriers.

Talk to your school or college's mental health, wellbeing, pastoral, or safeguarding lead before delivering the lesson. This will flag to them that there may be students in your class seeking further help on this issue after your lesson. They should also provide you with support and guidance for covering sensitive issues.

Encourage students to contribute, but allow them the right to pass on a question or activity. Students might feel uncomfortable discussing certain issues so never force anyone to share or contribute.

Distance topics from students by encouraging them to think and talk about sensitive topics in the third person. This will help to prevent personal examples being raised and reduce emotional responses to sensitive topics discussed. For example, help students think about what someone 'like them' might experience, feel, think, say or do: 'Can you imagine a young person about your age, and who...?' 'How might you advise a friend in this scenario...?'

Use ground rules for classroom discussions. This will help keep the discussion respectful. An example of a ground rule might be to remain honest and open, but to not directly discuss your own personal experiences or the private lives of others (i.e. leave out names and identifying descriptions from examples).

Teacher's slide – FAQs

Students may have additional questions after completing this lesson. This page is intended to give you answers to questions that aren't covered in the main lesson.

How old do you have to be to go to the doctors by yourself? Different people are ready at different ages to see a doctor or a nurse alone, and legally there is no set age to be seen without your parents. If you go to a doctor's appointment alone under the age of 18, the doctor will ask you some questions to determine if you are 'competent' – this means you clearly understand the treatment you'll be receiving and how it will affect you. If you are judged to be competent, the law says that you can make your own decisions about having treatment. This includes getting contraception, and also discussing/having an abortion, without your parent's permission.

Can I leave my parents or carers in the waiting room while I see the GP? Yes, absolutely. Just explain that you'd like some privacy.

Can I bring someone else to my doctor's appointment, for example, a sibling or a friend? Normally yes – though check with your GP practice just to be sure as some surgeries changed their policies after the coronavirus pandemic. If you are allowed to bring someone, choose someone you trust, and someone you don't mind talking about your problem in front of. Alternatively, you can leave them in the waiting room if you just want them to come along for moral support.

Is there anything I can do to prepare for my appointment? Before your appointment, write down details of your symptoms, including when they started and what makes them better or worse. You can also write down two or three important questions you'd like to ask your doctor. If you take any medicines (including vitamins and supplements) write these down as well.

Why do the receptionists ask you what you want to see the doctor about? It's embarrassing having to explain! Receptionists ask this so they can allocate appointments correctly – for example, making sure you see the best person to help with your problem, or making sure that you have enough time for your appointment. If your problem is something personal or embarrassing, try making an appointment online or over the phone so you don't have to announce your health issue in front of the whole waiting room! If even that sounds mortifying, just say "it's a personal issue and it's embarrassing, so I don't want to give details over the phone". They should understand!

I hate speaking on the phone. Are there any other ways to make appointments? Check your GP surgery website. Some have options to book online.

It's impossible to get through to my GP surgery on the phone – the line is always engaged! What should I do? This can be frustrating. First thing Monday morning is usually the busiest time for people calling their GP surgery, so if you're just trying to book a routine appointment, try calling midweek.

What if I don't understand what the doctor is telling me? Ask the doctor to explain again – they won't mind. After that, check your understanding by saying "can I just check I understand. Are you saying...?" You could also take notes and write down the key words so you can look them up on the NHS website later.

unifrog

Managing your health as
an independent adult

Starting point

Last lesson we looked at How can you maintain your health when living independently? Today we look at What happens when you actually need healthcare?

Imagine you have moved away from home and:

- you need to see a doctor
- your prescription is running out
- you aren't sure whether you need a GP, pharmacist, 111 or A&E
- you find conflicting health advice online

How confident would you be dealing with these without somebody else organising it for you?



Learning Objectives

- navigate healthcare services independently
- choose the most appropriate healthcare service for different situations
- explain your rights when accessing healthcare
- evaluate health information and make informed decisions



Managing Your Own Health

Last lesson you explored what it takes to maintain your health independently. Without looking back, identify five health responsibilities someone takes on when they leave home.

Then choose ONE: Which is likely to become hardest to maintain — and why?



Which THREE behaviours will have the biggest impact on health over the next ten years?

Health Independence Check

Scenario: you move into university accommodation next month.

Which of these have you already done?

- Know your NHS number
- Registered with a GP
- Ordered repeat medication independently
- Booked your own appointment
- Used NHS 111
- Been to a dentist in the last year
- Know how to book an emergency dental appointment



Navigating the Healthcare System

Different health concerns require different services.

Service	Use it for...
GP	Ongoing illnesses, mental health, referrals, long-term conditions
Pharmacy	Minor illnesses, medication advice, emergency contraception
NHS 111	Unsure where to go, urgent advice when GP isn't available
Urgent Treatment Centre	Minor injuries needing same-day treatment
Sexual Health Clinic	STI testing, contraception, pregnancy advice
A&E / 999	Serious or life-threatening emergencies

Which service would you choose in different situations?

Third Sector Support

Third sector organisations are charities and community organisations that provide specialist support.

Examples include:

- mental health charities
- bereavement services
- youth support organisations
- sexual health charities

People can access support through

- healthcare professionals
- school support staff
- charity websites
- local community services



Why might someone choose a charity rather than their GP?

Your Rights as a Young Adult

You have the right to:

- confidential healthcare
- consent to or refuse treatment (if you have capacity)
- access contraception and sexual health services
- ask questions before making decisions
- request a doctor of the same sex (where possible)

Why is confidentiality important for public health?



Mental Capacity

Healthcare professionals assess whether a young person understands:

- what the treatment involves
- possible risks and benefits
- alternative options
- consequences of their decision

Mental capacity is the ability to:

- understand information
- weigh up options
- communicate a decision.

Capacity may be affected by:

- serious illness or injury
- unconsciousness
- some mental health conditions.
- brain injury or conditions affecting decision-making.

Most people aged 16+ are presumed to have mental capacity.

If someone lacks capacity, healthcare professionals make decisions in their best interests.

An 18-year-old refuses surgery that doctors believe will save their life. Can doctors override the decision? Why?

Using the right service (10 mins)

Self-care

NHS 111

Pharmacy

GP surgery

A&E or 999
emergencies
only

For each scenario, decide:

1. Which service displayed above would you use?
2. Explain why it is the most appropriate choice.

A — Pharmacy
B — Self-care
C — NHS 111
D — GP Surgery
E — Pharmacy (*sexual health clinic also appropriate*)
F — 999 / A&E

- A. You wake up on Saturday with pain when urinating and think you may have a urinary tract infection.
- B. You've had a sore throat, cough and fever for four days, but you're otherwise well.
- C. You twist your ankle badly playing football and can't put any weight on it.
- D. You've been feeling anxious for several weeks and it's beginning to affect your sleep and college work.
- E. You had unprotected sex last night and want advice about emergency contraception and STI testing.
- F. A friend suddenly develops severe chest pain and struggles to breathe after taking cocaine at a party.

What happens when people use A&E instead of more appropriate services?



If you have toothache lasting several days, a broken tooth or bleeding gums, make an appointment with your dentist!

Barriers to healthcare



Some young people find it difficult to seek medical care when they need it. **Some people find it tricky to:**



- | | |
|-------------------------------|--|
| A. Make an appointment | D. Speak to a mental health specialist |
| B. Speak to a doctor or nurse | |
| C. Go to the dentist | E. Talk about their health worries |

Why do 18–24 year olds delay seeing a doctor?



Rank from most common to least common.

A. embarrassment B. fear C. time D. don't think it's serious
E. can't get appointments F. misinformation G. cost misconceptions

Knocking down barriers to healthcare

Myth or Fact?

Why do people believe this?

- A. "I'll be wasting the GP's time."
- B. "I'll have to pay."
- C. "My parents will find out."
- D. "If I Google it, I don't need a doctor."
- E. "If symptoms go away, it's fine."
- F. "I'm too busy to make an appointment."
- G. "I can just borrow my friend's medication."
- H. "I'm too embarrassed to talk about it."



Knocking down barriers to healthcare



Did you know...?

You can request a doctor who is the same sex as you, or you can ask for same-sex escort.

No-one can force you to have treatment you don't want – they have to get your consent.

What you say to your doctor is confidential. This means your doctor will not tell anyone else what you told them (unless they think you're at risk of serious harm).

Knocking down barriers to healthcare



Did you know...?

You can attend a doctor's appointment without your parents/carers, or ask them to stay in the waiting room.

Healthcare and prescriptions are free for all under-18s in the UK

You don't have to make any on-the-spot decisions. If you need more time to think through your treatment options, your doctor will understand!

You can find out about your treatment in advance by looking on the NHS website.

Registering with Healthcare

Register with a GP

- Register as soon as you move for university, work or an apprenticeship.
- You can choose a GP practice near where you live.

Order repeat prescriptions

Download the NHS

Book appointments online

Many GP surgeries allow you to:

- book appointments online
- request prescriptions
- submit online health queries

By the end of Year 13, every one of these boxes should be something you can confidently tick.
Managing your own healthcare is one of the biggest changes that comes with adulthood.

Which of these have you already done?



Moving away from home?

- Register with a new GP near your new address.
- Your medical records transfer automatically.

Beyond “Is this source reliable?”

Last lesson, you considered **which health sources are generally trustworthy**. But even professional-looking health information can be misleading.

Before believing or acting on a health claim, ask:

1. Who created it — and what are their qualifications?
2. What evidence supports the claim?
3. Is somebody making money from it?
4. Does it promise dramatic or guaranteed results?
5. Can the claim be confirmed by the NHS or another credible source?
6. Could the information have been generated by AI — and how would you verify it?



Would you trust it?

- A.** A TikTok doctor says a particular supplement improves concentration and links to a shop selling it.
- B.** An AI chatbot tells someone that their recurring headaches are probably caused by dehydration.
- C.** An NHS webpage explains several possible causes of recurring headaches and when to seek medical advice.
- D.** A fitness influencer says cutting carbohydrates completely will “reset your metabolism”.

For each scenario, consider: **What makes you trust/question it?**
What would you check before acting on it?

Giving advice to others (10 mins)



Scenario A: Your flatmate has: stopped exercising drinks every night sleeps four hours survives on takeaways hasn't registered with a GP.

Which problem should they tackle first?

Scenario B: Your friend has had a persistent cough for three weeks. They keep saying they're "too busy" to book a GP appointment and have been relying on advice from social media instead.

What advice would you give them? What should they do first, and why?

Scenario C: Your flatmate moved away from home two months ago. They take regular medication for asthma but have almost run out because they never registered with a GP near their new address.

What should they do now? What could they have done differently?

Independent learning

It can be difficult to know which information you can trust online!

[‘Five top tips to improve your physical health’](#)

[‘Healthcare 101’](#)

[NHS App](#)

The **Know-how library** is a reliable source of information about this topic and lots of others.

Search by the keyword ‘health’ or ‘healthcare’ in the Know-how library to find guides on this topic. Remember to favourite guides you’d like to come back to later!



Five top tips to help improve your physical health

Find out why being healthy is important and discover tips on being your healthiest self



Healthcare 101

Learn more about different types of healthcare and how to access them

Organisations that help with staying healthy

Searching 'healthy living' or 'healthcare advice' in your internet browser will bring up helpful resources and guide you with the first step in finding support.

The NHS Website (A complete guide to conditions, symptoms and treatments, including what to do and when to get help) [nhs.uk](https://www.nhs.uk)

NHS Live Well (advice and information on all aspects of a healthy lifestyle, from sleep and exercise to healthy eating and sun safety) [nhs.uk/live-well](https://www.nhs.uk/live-well)

Cancer Research UK (information and guidance to help prevent skin cancer) [cancerresearchuk.org](https://www.cancerresearchuk.org)

British Heart Foundation (information and guidance for healthy lifestyle) [bhf.org.uk](https://www.bhf.org.uk)

Mind (mental health support and advice, including information on physical activity) [mind.org.uk](https://www.mind.org.uk)

The Body Coach TV (free home workouts for all fitness levels from Joe Wicks) [youtube.com/c/TheBodyCoachTV](https://www.youtube.com/c/TheBodyCoachTV)

The Sleep Foundation (US-based information about the science of good sleep) [sleepfoundation.org](https://www.sleepfoundation.org)

One year from now...

Task: Before I leave Year 13...

Complete these three sentences:

1. One healthcare task I need to be able to do independently is...
2. One healthcare right I now understand is...
3. If I am unsure what healthcare I need, my first step will be...

Health at 18: What Changes?

Before 18	After 18
Parents often organise appointments	You organise them
School reminds you	Nobody reminds you
Home GP	May need to register elsewhere
Parents collect prescriptions	You collect them
School support	University/workplace support

Being healthy isn't just avoiding illness. It's knowing how to use healthcare confidently and independently.