

# Remembering spoken instructions

## LEARNING OUTCOMES

- To act on spoken instructions about dosage
- To ask questions to check understanding and to ask for more information



## RESOURCES

- Tray of everyday objects (for memory/instructions game)
- Copies of Resource 1 (colour if possible)
- Empty medicine packaging for role-play
- Cards prepared from Resource 2 (multiple copies of the question cards)
- Audio equipment [62–63](#)

## RELATED TOPICS

Checking medicine labels (Theme 12, Topic 4)  
Dosage and timing (Theme 12, Topic 5)

## HEALTH SKILLS

Patients often have problems understanding how to take their medicine, which may mean that they don't take it or don't take the right amount, or at the right frequency. This may have an adverse effect on the patient's condition.

Learners may have to listen to spoken instructions about taking the medicine when picking up a prescription or an over-the-counter medicine. Listening to instructions can be confusing, especially where there is more than one thing to remember.

This topic builds learners' confidence by giving practice in listening for key details, asking questions to ensure they understand what they need to do and are able to act on any advice or instructions where necessary.

### Related health information

The NHS website has a lot of information on the type of questions you could ask about taking medicine.

## FUNCTIONAL SKILLS

In order to understand and to be able to act on instructions for taking medicine, learners need to:

- know what sort of information to listen for
- understand common terms and phrases relating to dosage
- ask questions to check, clarify and confirm the instructions.

### Functional Skills/Core Curriculum

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

- listen for details in instructions  
**English** E3.1 (**L**SLlr/E3.2)
- ask questions to obtain information and to check understanding **English** E3.2 (**L**SLlr/E3.4) (**L**SLc/E3.4).

## Engage

- Introduce a memory game using a tray of objects, giving instructions for removing objects. Explain that the reason for doing this is to think about how easy or difficult it is to follow spoken instructions. Develop the activity from simple instructions (e.g. 'remove the pen') to more complex, multistep instructions (e.g. 'remove the glass, put the pen back on the tray, leave the cup where it is and slide the pencil sharpener to the other side').
- Ask learners which type of instruction was most memorable or easy to follow, and to explain why.
- Ask learners about the strategies they use to help them remember things (this might include asking questions) and what problems they have with remembering all the information.
- Ask learners if they have ever been given spoken instructions about taking medicine. Discuss the sort of instructions they might be given, such as how much/many to take and how often. Give examples of these, for example 'Take one tablet three times a day.' Make sure learners are clear that this means taking three tablets altogether over the course of a day (not all at once).
- Ask learners why it is important to follow the instructions for taking medicines. (If you take too little, the drug won't work; if you take too much, you may get side-effects.)

*How do you remember things best?*

*Why is it important to remember instructions for taking medicines?*

*What might happen if you took too many tablets or too few tablets?*

## Enable

### ACTIVITY 1 62–63

#### Listen for key details on dosage and ask questions to ensure they understand and can take action

- Hand out Resource 1 and read the introduction.
- To set the scene, look at the pictures and ask learners to describe what is happening.
- Go through each of the thought-bubbles in turn, asking learners to underline the key detail (i.e. 'how many', 'how often', 'when', 'how long'). Discuss these in detail and the type of words that learners might expect to hear in response. For example:
  - how many – a number (e.g. two tablets, one spoonful)
  - how often – the number of times (e.g. twice or three times a day)
  - when – at what times of day (e.g. morning and evening; with meals)
  - how long – when to stop taking them (e.g. when you finish the course).
- Play the audio clip of a pharmacist giving some instructions (track 53) through once for gist, then as many times as necessary for learners to answer the questions in the thought-bubbles in the top picture on Resource 1. Each time, remind learners what they are listening out for. Discuss the meaning of the phrase 'finish the course'.
- Point out the checking and confirming phrases on the lower half of the page. Ask learners to think of some other questions to ask.
- Play the second audio clip (track 63 – four short exchanges in which the woman asks questions to clarify the pharmacist's instructions) once through for gist. Then play the exchanges again one at a time. Discuss how the questions and answers help to make the instructions for taking the antibiotics clearer.

*How would you check that you have understood the instructions?*

### Support

- Read the audio scripts aloud, one sentence at a time, and ask learners direct questions about what they heard.
- Give examples of details you are likely to hear relating to dosage, and questions you can use to check information, to ensure learners understand what they need to do.

### ESOL

- Check learners understand the half-finished phrases in the checking and confirming speech-bubbles. Ask them to suggest different ways of completing them (e.g. 'So, I have to take them before meals?' 'Did you say four times a day?' 'What do you mean by side-effects?').
- Set up pairs to practise checking and clarifying dosage instructions. Learners can get the information from real medicine packages.

## ACTIVITY 2

### Practise selecting and remembering details from spoken instructions

- You will need the instruction cards and question cards prepared from Resource 2. In pairs, ask learners to role-play a pharmacist or doctor giving instructions to a patient. The 'doctor/pharmacist' takes an instruction card and reads the dosage instruction. The 'patient' repeats the main details of the instruction, using a prompt question if required. (They can make notes on these or use them as a reminder of the information to listen out for or a guide when repeating the instruction.) Learners can ask for information to be repeated, or check and confirm an instruction before repeating it themselves. (Note: learners may need up to three copies of the question cards.)
- Learners should then swap roles, using a new instruction card.
- Learners can continue this until all six instruction cards have been used (i.e. three for each person).
- At the end, discuss the strategies learners used to remember the instruction and what worked well or less well for them. Point out that different strategies work for different people; the most important thing is to develop a strategy that works for you.

*What are the key details to remember?*

#### TIP

Ask learners who you feel would struggle or really dislike role-play to act as an observer in the role-play, providing feedback.

*What strategy did you use to remember the instructions?*

### Support

- Some learners may not have the confidence to role-play or read out the information on the cards. Take the role of pharmacist/doctor so that learners can listen for the information and ask questions for clarification.
- Reassure learners that they are not expected to repeat the instruction word for word.
- Learners with poor memories could repeat one piece of information at a time, such as the number of tablets. This means the instructions would be repeated several times for them. They could also make a brief note to remind them (for example, by writing down the information on the card).
- Ask direct questions to help learners focus on the listening purpose. For example, 'How many tablets are you supposed to take?'

### ESOL

- Go through the information on the cards with learners to make sure they understand it.
- Make sure learners are clear about exactly which details they are listening for. They might want to underline key words such as 'how much', 'how often', 'when' and 'how long'.
- Review the phrases on Resource 1 that learners can use to check and confirm the information.

### Action

- Invite a speaker to give short instructions about using/taking a particular type of medicine (e.g. an inhaler for asthma or tablets for a specific medical condition).
- Learners should find out as much as they can about the safe use of the inhaler or tablets (particularly dosage), asking questions as well as listening to key details. They can note the information down in any form they like.
- Ask learners to summarise the key details of the instructions – how much to take, how often and when.
- Emphasise that it is OK for participants to ask questions so that they are sure they know what to do.

*How will you try to remember dosages and instructions?*

# Remembering spoken instructions

## RESOURCE 1

To help you remember spoken instructions:

- listen for key details
- ask questions to check details.

### Key details

How often must I take them?

When did she say I should take the tablets?

How long should I take them for?



How many tablets did she say I should take?

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### Checking

Can you repeat that?

What do you mean by ...?

Did you say ...?

So, I have to take ...



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### Confirming

# Remembering spoken instructions

RESOURCE 2A

## Instruction cards

I

Take two tablets every four hours, up to four times a day. It's important that you finish the course, even if you feel better.

I

Take one teaspoonful three times a day with meals. Don't take it for more than four days.

I

Take three tablets a day, one in the morning, one in the afternoon and one just before you go to bed. Come back when you've finished them all.

I

Take two tablets at regular intervals, up to four times a day until the pain has gone.

I

Take two tablets three times a day between meals. Stop taking them if you get any reaction, such as a rash.

I

Drink half a cup once a day, either in the morning or in the evening.

You can do this for up to a month.

# Remembering spoken instructions

RESOURCE 2B

## Question cards

Q

How much medicine should I take?

**Notes**

Q

How much medicine should I take?

**Notes**

Q

When should I take it?

**Notes**

Q

When should I take it?

**Notes**

Q

How long should I take it for?

**Notes**

Q

How long should I take it for?

**Notes**

Q

How often should I take it?

**Notes**

Q

How often should I take it?

**Notes**

# Remembering spoken instructions

## ANSWERS AND AUDIO SCRIPTS

### ANSWERS

#### ACTIVITY 1 / Resource 1

How many tablets to take = one

How often = three times a day

When to take them = morning, afternoon and evening

How long to take them = a week/seven days

### AUDIO SCRIPTS

#### ACTIVITY 1



**Pharmacist:** Now, these antibiotics are to get rid of your chest infection. You need to take one tablet three times a day. It's best to take them at regular intervals, one in the morning, one in the afternoon and then one in the evening. There's a week's supply here. It's really important that you finish the course, even if you're feeling better.



#### Extract 1

**Patient:** Can you repeat that?

**Pharmacist:** Take three tablets a day, for seven days. Take them at regular intervals and make sure you finish the packet.

#### Extract 2

**Patient:** What do you mean by regular intervals?

**Pharmacist:** Try and take them at about the same times every day, spread out evenly over the day. For example, morning, afternoon and evening, after food.

#### Extract 3

**Patient:** Did you say I take one tablet three times a day?

**Pharmacist:** Yes, that's right. One tablet three times a day.

#### Extract 4

**Patient:** So, I have to take them for seven days?

**Pharmacist:** Yes. There's a week's supply. Even if you feel better, carry on taking them until they're finished.