

# 14 Symptoms and signs

## A Describing problems

The problems which a patient reports to the doctor are called **symptoms**, for example pain or nausea. **Signs** are what the doctor finds, also known as **findings**, on examining the patient, for example high blood pressure or a rapid pulse rate. Symptoms are also known as **complaints**. To report a patient's symptoms or complaints, doctors say:

Mr Farnsworth was admitted  
complaining of chest pain.

In case notes, the abbreviation **c/o** is used:

c/o chest pain

## B Presentation

Patients say they **went to (see) the doctor**; doctors say the patient **presented**. The symptom which causes a patient to visit a doctor – or to **present** – is called the **presenting symptom**, **presenting complaint** or **presentation**.

His presenting symptom  
presenting complaint was chest pain.

He presented to his GP with chest pain.

The usual presentation is chest pain.

## C Talking about symptoms

| Symptom                                       | Meaning                         | Patients say   |
|---|---------------------------------|--|
| tiredness<br>lethargy<br>fatigue<br>lassitude | loss of energy                  | I feel tired all the time.<br>I feel completely worn out.<br>Lately I've been feeling completely exhausted at the end of the day.                                  |
| malaise                                       | general feeling of being unwell | I feel unwell.<br>I don't feel well.<br>I've been feeling off-colour for two days.<br>I haven't been feeling myself for a week.<br>I've been out of sorts all day. |
| anorexia                                      | loss of appetite                | My appetite is very poor.<br>I've been off my food for days.   |
| weight gain                                   | increase in weight              | I've put on eight kilos in the last year.<br>I've gained five kilos.   |
| weight loss                                   | decrease in weight              | I'm not eating any less than usual but I've lost a lot of weight recently.   |
| constipation                                  | hard, infrequent faeces         | My motions are very hard.<br>I've been quite constipated lately.<br>I'm not very regular.  |

Note: The verb **feel** is also used with other adjectives, such as **hot**, **cold**, **nervous**, **anxious**, **dizzy**, **weak** – *She said she felt dizzy.*

- 14.1 Complete the table with words from C opposite. Put a stress mark in front of the stressed syllable in each word. The first one has been done for you.

| Noun        | Adjective |
|-------------|-----------|
| ex'haustion |           |
| fatigue     |           |
| lethargy    |           |
| tiredness   |           |

- 14.2 Make word combinations using a word from each box. Look at A, B and C opposite to help you.

|  |  |
|--|--|
| complain<br>off-<br>out of<br>present<br>put<br>worn | with<br>of<br>out<br>on<br>colour<br>sorts |
|--|--|

- 14.3 Complete the sentences with the correct form of the verb *present*.

- 1 A 67-year-old man ..... with a 9-month history of increasing shortness of breath.
- 2 The most common ..... is loss of consciousness.
- 3 Cranial arteritis may ..... as fever without any obvious causes.
- 4 The patient usually ..... with a severe sore throat.
- 5 The ..... symptoms in this patient could perhaps be due to renal failure.
- 6 Other conditions with a similar ..... include acute cholecystitis.
- 7 Reduced growth is an important ..... complaint of coeliac disease.
- 8 Two months following ..... , the patient was able to walk.

- 14.4 Read the patient's description of her symptoms then complete the case report. Look at C opposite to help you.

I was well until a few months ago. In the beginning, I just felt off-colour and a bit tired. But lately I've been feeling completely worn out at the end of the day. I'm not eating any more than usual but I've put on nine kilos in the last year. My motions are hard and my hair has started to fall out.

#### Case 13

A 50-year-old housewife, who had been well until four months previously,  
 (1) ..... of tiredness and  
 (2) ..... . She had (3) .....  
 9 kg in weight in the year before she  
 (4) ..... to her GP although she  
 denied eating more than usual. She was  
 (5) ..... and she noticed that her  
 hair had started to fall out.

#### Over to you

Write a short case report about this 60-year-old man:

I haven't been myself for several months now. I feel completely worn out after doing anything. I've been off my food and I've lost ten kilos in weight.

Write in the past tense and use medical terms for the underlined expressions. Practise writing similar case reports for your own patients.