

Things people say!

Introduction

This document has been divided into themes, initially relating to medications, investigations and examinations. The next part relates to phrases or words that may be relevant to different specialties. Finishing with general phrases that you may come across in consultations.

Non-medical words used by patients are often more descriptive of the thing/procedure. For example, an ECG may be referred to as a 'Heart tracing', and an inhaler may be called a 'Puffer'.

A lot of the words we would refer to as 'Slang' words. These are words or phrases used in informal everyday language as an alternative to a more formal word (often in this document, a more medical word).

Some of the words and phrases that patients say may not be appropriate for healthcare professionals to use. They may be considered vulgar or be a swear word. Swear words are usually slang words that relate to genitalia or sexual intercourse. Swear words tend to be reserved by people to make the point about extreme emotions, although some people never say them while others use them as a normal word. **I will highlight swear words in RED.**

Slang words and phrases usually have some history behind their meaning. For example, older people might refer to passing urine as 'Spending a penny'. This is because years ago public toilets required payment of a penny to enter. Lots of phrases are a more interesting interpretations of the situation, for example *ignoring an issue* is often referred to as '*Burying your head in the sand*'. Many of these visual phrases were created by Shakespeare!

Just to make it even more tricky some words can have more than one meaning. A common example is *dizzy/dizziness* as this can refer to *Vertigo*, *Postural hypotension*, and sometimes a more vague sensation of the *brain not working properly*.

The most important thing is that you and the patient understand each other. If you are not sure what the meaning of the word/phrase is then ask. "*I'm sorry, do you mind if I ask what you mean by....?*"

When explaining things it can be useful to be in the habit of saying both the medical term and an informal version together the first time, eg "*I would like to arrange an ECG heart tracing.*"

Finally, this is a living document! If you do come across other words or phrases that patients have said and you feel they should be included please let me know, martin.benfield@hee.nhs.uk

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Prescribing Abbreviations

Latin abbreviations are often used when prescribing; the following is a list of the common abbreviations. It should be noted that the English version is not always an exact translation. You will already know most of the abbreviations, but may be not what they actually translate as:

- **NKDA** (no known drug allergies)
- **od** (omni die = every day)
- **om or mane** (omni mane = every morning)
- **nocte** (omni nocte = every night)
- **bd** (bis die = twice daily)
- **tds** (ter die sumendum = to be taken three times daily)
- **qds** (quater die sumendum = to be taken four times daily)
- **prn** (pro re nata = when required)
- **Stat** (Immediately)
- **po** (per oris = orally)
- **s/l** (sub-lingual)
- **IV** (intravenous)
- **IM** (intramuscular)
- **S/C** (sub-cutaneous)
- **PR** (per rectum)
- **PR** (per vagina)

Investigations

Below are some examples of investigations. Either just to describe the abbreviation or to give an example of how you could explain them to a patient.

- **Bowel cancer screening test (uses the FIT test, it is used to look for microscopic blood in stool)**

“In England, people aged 60 to 75 years are routinely offered bowel cancer screening every two years. The test kit should automatically be sent to you in the post. The test detects particles that could suggest bowel cancer. There is a stick that you push into your stool, then you put the stick back in the container. It is returned in a freepost envelope to the laboratory for testing. The test does not diagnose bowel cancer, but it will indicate if a camera test is required.”

This can also be used to describe a FIT test kit you have given to the patient yourself. The kits you arrange from GP will be reported as abnormal at a lower number than the screening kits. If a patient presents with symptoms still arrange a FIT test even if they had a screening test very recently.

- CSU (Catheter urine sample), MSU (Mid-stream urine sample)

“A mid-stream sample is best as the first bit of urine that you pass may be contaminated with bacteria from the skin. Pass some urine into the toilet, then without stopping the flow of urine, catch some urine in a sterile pot.”

- Urine dip (Urine dipstick)

“A dipstick is put into a fresh sample of urine to see if there is any blood, protein or sugar in it, or any evidence to suggest a urine infection.”

- ECG (Electrocardiogram) / ‘Heart tracing’

“A heart tracing ECG records the electrical activity of the heart. Small pads are stuck onto your arms, legs and chest so that the machine can detect the electrical impulses that occur with each heartbeat and records them onto paper or a computer. It takes about five minutes.”

- Smear – this is the informal term used widely for the Cervical screening test

“In England, women aged 25 to 64 years are routinely offered cervical screening. This is every three years if aged 25-49 years and every five years if aged 50-64 years. The test is done by the practice nurse. The test is done to prevent cancer before it has developed, not to diagnose cancer. During the test, a brush is used to remove some cells from your cervix which is the neck of your womb. The cells are examined under a microscope to look for early changes that if ignored and not treated could develop into cancer of the cervix.”

The smear test can only be performed as part of the routine national screening. It can not be sent early (ie before 3 years in patients 25-49 years old). If the person presents with pelvic symptoms other investigations are required.

Any Endoscopy procedure involving a camera is often referred to as a ‘Camera test’

- OGD (Oesophago-Gastro Duodenoscopy)

“An OGD is a common test used to look into the upper part of the gut. An endoscope is a thin, flexible telescope about the width of a finger. The tip of the endoscope contains a light

and a video camera. You will be awake for the procedure but you will be offered some sedation to help you relax. You will lie down and an operator (usually a Doctor) then passes the endoscope through your mouth, down your gullet into the stomach and the first part of your intestine. The test usually takes about 10 minutes; it does not usually hurt but can be uncomfortable, particularly when you first swallow the endoscope."

- **Colonoscopy or Sigmoidoscopy**

"A sigmoidoscopy is a common test used to look into your rectum and final part of your bowel, which is called the sigmoid colon. A sigmoidoscope is a thin, flexible telescope about the width of a finger. The tip of the sigmoidoscope contains a light and a video camera. You will be awake for the procedure but you will be offered some sedation to help you relax. You will lie down and an operator (usually a Doctor) then passes the sigmoidoscope up your bottom and into your rectum and sigmoid colon. The colon needs to be empty in order to get a clear view; you will be given some special dietary instructions and some laxatives to take for the few days beforehand. The test usually takes about 10 minutes; it does not usually hurt but can be uncomfortable, particularly when the sigmoidoscope is first passed through your anus."

Top and tail endoscopy = both OGD and colonoscopy

- **Ultrasound scan**

"An ultrasound scan is a painless test that uses sound waves to create images on a screen of the organs and structures inside your body. You will lie down on a couch, lubricating jelly is placed on your skin, and the operator will place a probe, a bit like a door knob, on top of the jelly. The operator moves the probe over the surface of the skin to get views from different angles. The scan takes 15-45 minutes depending on what part of the body is being examined."

- **Heart monitor**

"This test is where you wear a small monitor which constantly records your heart rhythm. The test records the electrical activity of your heart whilst you are walking about and doing your normal activities. It aims to detect abnormal heart rhythms that come and go. The electrical activity is usually recorded for 24 hours or 7 days".

- **Treadmill Test = Exercise Electrocardiogram**

"An exercise ECG is done when the heart tracing is recorded whilst you exercise, usually on a treadmill."

- Echocardiogram

“An echocardiogram is a painless test that uses sound waves to create images on a screen of what your heart looks like and can assess how well it is working. You will lie down on a couch, lubricating jelly is placed on your chest, and the operator will place a probe a bit like a door knob on top of the jelly. The operator moves the probe over the surface of the skin to get views from different angles. The scan takes 15-30 minutes.”

Computerised Tomography/CT scan

“A CT scan is a specialised x-ray test that can create quite clear pictures of the inside of your body. The CT scanner looks like a giant thick ring or a doughnut. You lie on the couch which slides through the middle of the ring until the part of your body that needs to be scanned is within the ring. The CT scan is painless, you will be asked to stay as still as possible otherwise the scan pictures may be blurred. The scan can take between 5 to 30 minutes depending on which part(s) of the body are being scanned.”

- MRI scan (Magnetic Resonance Imaging)

“An MRI scan is a safe and painless test that can create detailed pictures of the inside of your body. The MRI scanner looks like a tunnel about a metre or so long. You lie on the couch which slides into the tunnel. It uses magnets not x-rays to form a picture. The MRI scan is painless, you will be asked to stay as still as possible otherwise the scan pictures may be blurred. The scan can take 15-40 minutes depending on which part(s) of the body are being scanned. The scanner is noisy so you may be given earplugs or headphones so you can listen to some music.”

- Brain trace/tracing (Electroencephalograph/EEG)

“An EEG is a test to help diagnose epilepsy. It is like an ECG heart tracing but for the brain. It records the electrical activity of the brain. The machine records electrical signals coming from your brain. The operator will attach several small pads to your scalp; wires from the pads are connected to the EEG machine. The machine detects the electrical signals and records them on to paper or a computer. The test takes about 20-30 minutes.”

- Peak Flow Meter or Spirometry = Blowing test

“A peak flow meter is a small device that measures the fastest rate of air that you can blow out from your lungs. The test can help diagnose and monitor lung conditions such as asthma. First you breathe in fully and then seal your lips around the mouthpiece of the peak flow meter. You then blow out as fast as you can. The test is usually repeated three times with the highest value recorded.”

“Spirometry is a test that can help diagnose and monitor various lung conditions. The test looks at how well your lungs work and how well you breathe in and out. First you breathe in fully and then seal your lips around the mouthpiece of the spirometer. You then blow out as fast and as far as you can until your lungs feel completely empty.”

Explaining Examinations

Patients need to give informed consent before being examined. That means giving a brief explanation of what you are going to do and why.

The explanation would generally be increased if it is going to be more inconvenient to the patient, eg might cause pain or be an intimate examination. You also need more explanation if you are going to do an examination that might not seem obviously linked to the presenting symptoms, eg looking for lymph nodes in the groin.

Usually start with a general explanation and permission initially, rather a full description of everything in one go. *“If it is ok with you, I would like to examine your lungs and look for signs of infection”*. Further explanations can be split up and done as you go, if needed. For the lung examination check ok about areas to expose when it comes to it. You don't need to keep asking permission at every stage. However, as above, if the examination is not obviously linked to the initial description explain and check this is ok.

There is a balance when asking permission to examine between adequate consent and asking too much, and so irritating the patient. Patients have come to you for you to find out what is wrong with them. If you keep asking permission they will be thinking, 'For goodness sake, just get on with it!'

Below are some examples for some of the examination areas.

Fundoscopy

'Look at the back of your eye.'

“I need to look at the back of your eye with my torch.”

“I am going to come quite close so I can look at the back of your eye.”

Mouth/throat examination

'Say aaaah'

“Please say aaaah for me!”

Lymph nodes

Lymph nodes are often referred to as 'glands' or lumps – “Doctor my glands are up.” This can cause a bit of confusion around the jaw line as lumps might be salivary glands or lymph nodes.

“I am going to feel around your neck for any glands that might be up.”

“Is it ok to check your armpits/groin for any glands that might be up?”

Respiratory examination

“Is it ok if I have a listen to your chest?”

“I am just going to tap on your back to check for any evidence of fluid in your lungs.”

You might have noticed the word 'just' can be put into sentences to soften the suggestion, to suggest the examination will be easy/painless.

Don't use the word 'quick' to soften the request, eg *“I am going to quickly examine you.”* Patients want a proper examination, not a quick one!

Heart examination

“If it is ok, I would like to have a listen to your heart, your lungs, and check some other things like your pulse and blood pressure.”

Breast examination

“How often do you check your breasts for lumps?” (without the 'How often...' ie 'Do you check...' will get a yes or no answer, the patient may reply 'yes' even if only checked once every 10 years! How often is more likely to get a realistic answer. You could follow up with, *“When was the last time you think you might have checked your breasts?”* if the answer was uncertain, especially if useful for the history.

After examination (if examination normal and if needed), you could give some health care advice, *“Do you think you would be able to start examining your breasts for lumps every month, may be at the end of each period?”* Keep consultation structure, usually don't give any advice until the management plan stage.

Abdominal examination

'Tummy' is a commonly used word for abdomen.

Patients will often refer to their 'stomach' meaning the whole abdomen, rather than specifically the epigastric area.

A patient may refer to being 'Poked and prodded' if someone had palpated their abdomen: *'The Doctor gave me a poke and a prod, then said I had appendicitis'*

The anus is often referred to as their 'back passage'. *'I would like to examine your back passage to look for a cause of the bleeding. I will need to use my finger to feel for any lumps. Would that be ok?'*

Vaginal examination

The genitalia may be described as 'down below'. *'The Doctor examined me down below'*
'I need to examine you down below to see what the cause of your symptoms is.'

Vaginal or rectal examinations are sometimes referred to as 'Internal examinations'. *'The Doctor did an internal examination and said that I had a polyp.'*

We have to be careful when using non-medical terms that we and the patient are both referring to the same thing! Always clarify with the patient a non-medical term if you are unsure what the patient meant by it. Also check what the patient meant by a medical term if it didn't seem to match with what they were describing.

It might be worth being in the habit of using both medical and non-medical terms together. Eg, *'I need to examine you down below, a vaginal examination, to see what is the cause of your symptoms.'*

Describing Good Health

The following phrases are responses you may receive to the question "How are you?" when patients are describing good health.

- 100% *'I feel 100%', 'I feel 110% better'*
- A million dollars, *'I feel like a million dollars'*
- A.O.K., *'I'm A.O.K'*
- Awesome, *'I feel awesome'*
- Back on track, *'I'm back on track now that my chest infection has cleared up'*
- Brand new, *'I feel brand new now I've had my knee replacement'*
- Can't complain, *'I can't complain'*
- Champion, *'I feel champion'*
- Clean bill of health = told by a doctor there was nothing wrong, *'The doctor gave me a clean bill of health'*

- Cloud 9 = very happy, *'I feel like I am on cloud 9'*
- There are lots! Here's a few more: *'I couldn't be better', 'I'm feeling grand', 'I feel as fit as a fiddle', 'I feel as fit as the butcher's dog', 'I'm good as gold', 'I am in good shape', 'Everything is hunkey dorey', 'I feel like a new man/woman', 'Since I have had a week off work I have felt on top of the world', 'I'm over the moon', 'Life is peachy', 'I'm a picture of health', 'I feel as right as rain', 'I'm in ship shape', 'I'm sound as a pound', 'I feel spot on', 'I feel tickety boo', 'Everything is ticking along nicely', 'I feel in tip top condition', 'I'm on top form', 'I feel top notch'.*

There are some phrases that are a more modest way of saying they are ok. Usually either implies they are ok but they don't want to boast about it, or they are generally ok but there is something not perfect so they don't want you to think *everything* is ok.

- *'It could be worse', 'Musn't grumble', 'Not too bad', 'I'm surviving'.*

Describing Bad Health

The following phrases are responses you may receive to the question "How are you?" when patients are describing bad health.

The first set will often refer to being acutely unwell, usually an infection:

- Burning up = Fever, *'I have been burning up all night'*
- Below/under par, *'I feel below par', 'I feel under par'*
- Dead and buried, *'I feel like I'm dead and buried'*. Death warmed up, *'I feel like death warmed up'*
- Off colour, *'He has been looking off colour all week'*
- Pants, *'I'm feeling a bit pants'*
- Peaky, *'I feel a bit peaky'*
- Poorly, *'I have been feeling poorly for days'*
- Under the weather, *'I have been feeling under the weather all week'*
- The next few all begin with the letter 'R' for some reason: *Ropey, 'I'm feeling absolutely ropey'; Rotten, 'I feel rotten'; Rough, 'I haven't felt this rough for a long time'; Rubbish, 'I'm feeling rubbish at the moment'; Run down, 'I've been feeling so run down recently'*
- Sick as a dog, *'I feel sick as a dog'*, means they feel very ill, usually with vomiting (or bad nausea without vomiting).
- Not firing on all cylinders, *'I'm not firing on all cylinders'*

Feeling funny, *'I'm feeling a bit funny'*. This is often used if a person can't explain their symptoms, eg mild temperatures, tiredness, aches but with no obvious reason.

Gone downhill, *'I feel like I have gone downhill since I had a stroke'*. Depending on the situation might imply over days, weeks, or months. Can often imply a concern over their wellbeing.

Putting down, *'I need putting down'*. Might be added as a comedy phrase, but it might reveal a hidden concern over how the patient feels about their overall health, or the patient wanted in a light hearted way let you know they are dealing with a few things at the moment.

These terms refer to feeling tired:

- Knackered = tired, Cream crackered is rhyming slang for knackered, *'I feel totally cream crackered'*
- Worn out, *'I'm feeling totally worn out'*
- Shattered, *'I feel completely shattered'*

Two left feet, *'I feel like I've got two left feet'*. This would usually imply the patient is off balance.

These terms have mental health implications, or ability to cope:

- Down in the dumps (Low mood), *'I feel down in the dumps'*
- Falling apart, *'I feel like I'm falling apart'*. Falling to bits/pieces *'I'm falling to bits', 'I'm falling to pieces'*. Broken, *'I feel broken'*
- Out of sorts, *'I've been feeling out of sorts'* – this could also mean they have felt physically unwell.
- *Shit, 'I feel shit', 'I look like shit'. Crap, 'I feel crap', 'I look like crap'* - crap is slang for stool so some people consider this to be a mild swear word
- *Up shit creek, 'I think I'm up shit creek'* – means in a bad place, have no good options

Cardiovascular

Some older patients might refer to their heart as their 'ticker'.

- *"My husband died from a problem with his ticker"; "I am worried about my ticker"; "My old ticker is not as strong as it used to be."*

Most people have heard of the term ‘heart murmur’, but virtually no one knows what that means!

- Don’t be tricked by a patient confidently saying they have been told they have a murmur – ask them what they were told was the cause of the murmur.
- *“A heart murmur is usually blood making a sound when it is being pumped through the heart.”*

Asking the patient if they have had an Echocardiogram:

- *“Do you remember if you ever had an **echo scan of the heart** to work out what was causing it?”*

Myocardial Infarction is usually referred to as a ‘Heart attack’:

- *“I had a **heart attack** last year”; “The pain was so bad I thought I was having a **heart attack**.”*

‘Palpitations’ is a phrase patients use to describe a sensation of being able to feel their heart beat. Do not make any assumptions about what they mean by the word palpitation – ask them to describe the sensation, eg *“What sensation do you feel when you get one of your palpitations?”*, and tap out the beat.

Atrial Fibrillation/AF:

- *“I am on Warfarin for my **irregular heart**.”*
- INR may be referred to as their **Warfarin level**, *“I am next due to have my **Warfarin level** checked on Friday.”*

Diuretics are often described as ‘Water tablets’:

- *“The **water tablets** have really helped my leg swelling, but they make me go to the toilet all morning.”*
- Some patients mix up bladder medications with diuretics because of this ‘water tablet’ term

Respiratory

If a person is coughing and bringing up sputum, ie Productive cough, it may referred to as 'Fruity': *"I've had a fruity cough."*

Sputum can be referred to as 'Phlegm', 'Muck', 'Gunk', eg *"I've been coughing up muck."*

Be careful with interpreting answers sometimes. If a person can feel mucous in their chest but not actually getting anything up they may answer 'no' to, "Is your cough productive?"

Sometime people refer to their cough as 'infective' if it is productive. Often assuming if the sputum is green it must need antibiotics.

A cough that occurs in bad spasms might be said to be *"Coughing my guts up."*

Shortness of breath = *Out of breath*: *"I get out of breath when I walk up the stairs."*

Inhalers are referred to as 'Puffers': *"I've got two puffers, a blue puffer and a brown puffer."*

Salbutamol is the commonest prescribed short acting beta agonist and is a blue colour.

Clenil is the commonest inhaled corticosteroid and is brown.

A very sore throat may be referred to as 'Swallowing razor blades': *"I feel like I have been swallowing razor blades."*

Both a Peak Flow test and a Spirometry might be called a 'blowing test': *"I have come in for the results of my blowing test."*

Gastroenterology

There are lots of words to describe vomiting. Probably the commonest word is 'sick'. Be careful with this as being 'sick' could mean being ill in general, nausea, or vomiting! If not clear what they mean, ask.

- *"I am feeling sick"* (usually means nauseous); *"I have been sick"* (usually means vomited)

Nauseous:

- 'Feeling queasy': *"I have been feeling queasy since I ate at that restaurant last night"; "I always get queasy when travelling on boats."*

Vomiting

- *"Last night I chundered"; "I thought I was going to spew"; "My puke had some blood in it"; "I was feeling sick and then I chucked up"; "I have been throwing up all night."*

Acid reflux is often referred to as 'Heartburn', ie a burning sensation in the heart area of the chest.

- *"I suffer with really bad heartburn every time I eat spicy food"*

You need to be careful with the word 'Indigestion'. As well as acid reflux and epigastric symptoms, it can also be used to refer to bowel symptoms.

There are lots of words used instead of stools/faeces:

- 'Poo', 'Number 2' ('number 1' refers to passing urine), 'going to the toilet' (can mean either stools or urine), **Crap, Shit, Turds**.

These can be used in relation to constipation. People sometimes use the term 'constipated' when they haven't passed stool for only 1 day, or not realise they are constipated when they are only passing small amounts of hard stool each day.

- *"He has not had a poo for three days"; "I haven't been for a number two for 4 days"; "It feels like I am shitting bricks"; "It hurts every time I go for a Crap"; "I have been bunged up for a week now"; "My turds are very hard."*

Phrases describing diarrhoea:

- *"I've got the squits at the moment"; "I've been off work with the runs"; "My child has had runny poos since I started weaning him"; "I have got a dodgy stomach"; "I cannot stop crapping."*

Haemorrhoids are often referred to as 'Piles':

- *"I've suffered with piles since my last pregnancy"; "There has been some blood when I have taken a shit recently";*

People may refer to their Abdomen as their 'tummy', 'belly', or their 'stomach' (can be used to refer to whole abdomen, not just their epigastrium)

Anus: 'tail end', 'bottom', 'bum', 'rectum', 'rear end', 'backside', 'bum hole', 'arse'.

- *"I have been bleeding from my tail end"; "My rear end has been very sore"; "I cannot sit on my backside"; "I have an itchy bum hole"; "My arse is very sore!"*

Wind (Flatus): 'windy', 'fart'

- *"I have been very windy recently"; "I've got terrible trapped wind"; "I seem to be farting a lot more than normal."*

Endoscopy investigations:

- *"You need to have a camera test to look into your..."*
- Arranging both an OGD and Colonoscopy is sometime referred to as a 'Top and Tail'.

Musculoskeletal

Genu varum of the knees = Bow legs: *"I think she has bow legs."*

Genu valgum = Knock knees: *"I've always had knock knees."*

Hallux valgus = Bunion: *"My bunions are really hurting."*

Parents may be concerned about hip abnormality if their baby has 'clicky hips': *"My child has clicky hips."*

Neurology

Cerebral Infarction = Stroke: *"My wife had a stroke last week."*

Transient Ischaemic Attack/TIA can be referred to as a 'mini stroke': *"I had a mini-stroke last year."* A lot of people will under estimate symptoms as they are scared, so a mini stroke or TIA might be used to refer to a stroke event where symptoms actually continued for longer than 24 hours.

There are a variety of words to describe a sensation of their brain not working properly. Never assume you know whether this is postural hypotension, vertigo, or confusion:

- 'Came over funny': *"He was ok one minute then he came over all funny"*
- 'Giddy': *"I get giddy every time I stand up."*
- 'Muzzy': *"I keep waking up with a muzzy head."*
- 'Swimmy': *"My head is feeling swimmy."*
- 'Woozey': *"I feel woozey."*

Computerised Tomography/CT scan may be referred to as a 'doughnut scan': "My wife had a *doughnut scan*."

Electroencephalograph/EEG = 'Brain trace/tracing': "You need to have a *tracing of your brain* to confirm if you have epilepsy."

Obstetrics and Gynaecology

Phrases referring to pregnancy:

- 'Bun in the oven': "I've got a *bun in the oven*."
- 'Expecting': "I'm *expecting*."
- 'Preggers': "I can't drink because I'm *preggers*."
- 'Up the duff': "I am *up the duff*."
- 'Eating for two': "I'm *eating for two*."

Female genitalia:

- 'Down below': "I've got a problem *down below*"
- 'Fanny': "My *fanny* is very itchy and sore"
- 'Privates': "My *privates* are very itchy."
- 'Pubes' = Pubic hair

Menstruation:

- 'Monthly': "I've got my *monthly*"
- 'Periods': "Are your *periods* regular?"
- 'Time of the month': "I get painful breasts around the *time of the month*."

Emergency contraception = 'Morning after pill': "I need the *morning after pill* Doctor."

Cervical screening test = 'Smear': "You need to book in for your *smear* as it is overdue."

Termination of pregnancy: "I want to be referred for an *termination*"; "I want to be referred for an *abortion*."

Oral contraceptive pill = 'The Pill': "Can I get some more of my *pill*?"

Breast

"How often do you check your breasts for lumps?"

Asking *'do you check your breasts'* will get a yes or no answer, the patient may reply *'yes'* even if only checked once every 10 years! *'How often'* is more likely to get a realistic answer. You could follow up with, *"When was the last time you think you might have checked your breasts?"*

After examination (if examination normal and if needed), you could give some health care advice, *"Do think you would be able to start examining your breasts for lumps every month, may be at the end of each period?"*

Urology

Typically men struggle with talking about personal medical things, hence lots of different words used for testicles and penis. To most people testicles and scrotum means the same thing. I haven't marked these as red as I would advice not using any of these terms, stick to the medical words.

Scrotum: *'Ball bag'*, eg *"My ball bag is very itchy."*

Testicles: *'Balls'*, *'bollocks'*, *'nuts'*, *'knackers'*, *'nads'*, eg *"One of my nuts is painful."*

The term *'Crown Jewels'* can refer to penis and/or testicle.

Penis: *'Cock'*, *'Dick'*, *'Prick'*, *'Todger'*, *'Willy'*, *'Winkie'*.

Men or women might refer to their genitalia as *'Privates'*, or *'Down below'*, eg *"I've got a problem down below."*

Erectile dysfunction might be referred to as *'Getting it up'*, eg *"I've got a problem getting it up."*

Urination: *'Passing urine'*, *'Wee'*, *'Pee'*, *'Piss'*, *'Number one'*, *'Spend a penny'*, eg *"Yesterday there was blood in my piss."*

Urine issues might be referred to as their *'Water works'*. A Urinary tract infection being a *'Water infection'*. This is why a 'water tablet' (diuretic) makes a lot of people think it is helping their bladder work.

Dysuria might be referred to as weeing *'Glass'* or *'Razor blades'*.

Smoking and Alcohol

Cigarettes: *'Ciggy/Ciggies'*, *'Fags'*, eg *"I smoke 20 fags a day."*

If a person uses Tobacco and paper to make their own cigarettes the tobacco might be referred to as *'Baccy'*, and the home made cigarettes as *'Roll ups'*. Rather than number of

cigarettes smoked per day, these are recorded as weight of tobacco used, eg “I smoke 50g of baccy each week”. The papers are often known as ‘Rizzlers’.

Alcohol: ‘Booze’, ‘The Drink’, eg “I only drink *booze* at weekends.”

Very drunk: ‘Hammered’, ‘Pissed’, ‘Smashed’, eg “I got *hammered* last weekend.”

Alcohol detoxification = ‘Detox’

Not drinking/abstaining for a period = ‘Dry’, eg “I’ve been *dry* for 5 years.”

Needing an alcoholic drink in the morning to reduce hangover/withdrawal shakes = an ‘Eye opener’, eg “Do you ever need an *eye opener*?”

Illicit Drugs

Illicit drugs often have slang names, these names may be descriptive of the actual drug or the effects the drug has on the user.

LSD: Acid, Tab.

Benzodiazepines: Benzos.

Marijuana: Dope, Ganja (Jamaican word for Marijuana), Grass, Hash, Pot, Weed. Eighth (one-eighth of a pound of drugs). Joint (a Marijuana cigarette).

Cocaine: C, Charlie, coke, Snow, Crack (Cocaine prepared for smoking).

Heroin: Brown, Gear, Junk, Smack. Chasing the dragon (smoking Heroin). Junkie (an opiate addict). Shoot up (to inject intravenously).

Methadone: Meth.

Ecstasy: Brownies, E’s.

Glue sniffer: Gluey.

Ketamine: Special K.

Amphetamines: Speed.

Anabolic steroids: Roids.

High (to be intoxicated on drugs). Stoned (under the influence of drugs, usually Marijuana). Trip/Tripping (under the influence of drugs)

Cold turkey (sudden withdrawal from drugs). Clean (drug free)

General phrases

This is a selection of phrases you might hear used:

A lot on their plate = to have a lot of work to do, or a lot of problems to deal with, eg "My father has Parkinson's Disease and my mother has dementia, I feel like I *have a lot on my plate* at the moment."

Bent over backwards = to try as hard as you possibly can to do something, usually to please or help someone, eg "I have *bent over backwards* to ensure that everything was ready on time."

Burning the candle at both ends = staying up late and getting up early, eg "I've got so much work on at the moment, I've been *burning the candle at both ends*."

Burying your head in the sand = to try to pretend something unpleasant isn't happening, because you don't want to have to deal with it, eg "He has *been burying his head in the sand* since the doctor told him he had cancer."

Can't make ends meet = not enough money to buy food, clothes and other things that are needed, eg "Since I lost my job, I am really struggling to *make ends meet*."

Cross that bridge when we come to it = don't waste time worrying about what might happen, but will deal with a problem if and when it does happen, eg "I'm worried that we will have to sell our house but my husband said that we can *cross that bridge when we come to it*."

Drive someone round the bend/wall = to annoy or bore them so much that they feel they are going to lose control of themselves, eg "Peter is *driving me round the bend* at the moment", "Catherine is *driving me up the wall* talking all the time."

Face the music = to take responsibility for doing something wrong, and to prepare yourself for criticism or punishment, eg "I will have to *face the music* when I go back to work."

Flew off the handle = suddenly become very angry and appear out of control, eg "She *flew off the handle* when I suggested that she wasn't coping very well."

Full of beans = to be full of energy and be very active, eg "He is *full of beans*, I can't get him to sit still."

Given the sack = to lose your job, eg "He kept arriving late for work so he has been *given the sack*."

Got a chip on their shoulder = they are resentful about not having the benefits that they think other people have, eg "She's got a huge *chip on her shoulder*."

Got a frog in my throat = can't speak clearly because your throat is dry or hoarse, eg "I've had a *frog in my throat* since I had that cold last week."

Got butterflies in their tummy = feeling nervous about something they have to do, eg “I’ve got *butterflies in my tummy* about the presentation I have to do next week at work.”

Got out on the wrong side of bed = in a bad mood, usually for no obvious reason, eg “She is in a terrible mood, she must have *got out of the wrong side of the bed* this morning.”

Missed the boat = to miss or fail to take an opportunity to do something, eg “I think I’ve *missed the boat*, I should have been referred earlier.”

Not out of the woods yet = to still be having problems or be in a difficult situation, eg “He has left the intensive care unit but he is *not out of the woods* yet.”

Opening a can of worms = doing something that would lead to all sorts of complicated problems, eg “I know I need to tell him, but I am worried about *opening a can of worms*.”

Over the moon = to be very happy about something, eg “The result came back normal, she was over the moon as she thought it was something sinister.”

Pulling your weight = to suggest that someone is not working as hard as they should be, eg “I am getting very tired with doing all the housework, I wish my husband would pull his weight.”

Rings a bell = it sounds familiar, but you can’t remember exactly, eg “Have you tried Citalopram before?” “The name rings a bell but I cannot be sure.”

Rock the boat = to disrupt a stable situation, usually by interfering or trying to do things differently, eg “I haven’t told my husband yet as I didn’t want to rock the boat.”

Square meal = a good, filling meal, eg “I would feel better if I had a good square meal.”

Start the ball rolling = to start an activity, eg “I thought we could start the ball rolling by having an x-ray of my knee first.”

Take the bull by the horns = deal with a tricky situation in a direct and determined way, eg “I know it’s not going to be easy, but I guess I will have to take the bull by the horns and just do it.”

The ball is in your court = it is their turn to do something or to decide what to do next before progress can be made, eg “I don’t know what to do doctor, the ball is in your court.”

The last straw = one final thing in a series of difficulties has made you feel that the situation is intolerable, eg “I have been feeling low in mood for a while, but losing my job was the last straw.”

Thrown in at the deep end = to be given a difficult new job or task, without any preparation, eg “I started a new job last week, I feel like I have really been thrown in at the deep end.”

Turned over a new leaf = to start behaving in a better way than before, eg “I’ve decided to turn over a new leaf, I am going to stop smoking.”

Walking on eggshells = to be careful about what you say or do in case you upset someone who you think is being over-sensitive, eg "I feel like I am walking on eggshells every time I see him."

Giving me gyp = causing a problem, usually pain, eg "My shoulder has been *giving me gyp* or months."

Out of sorts = not feeling fully well, often in a vague way, eg "I'm not sure what is wrong, I've just been feeling *out of sorts*."

A shot in the arm = a metaphorical injection that will cure/give more energy, eg "I've been really tired recently, I feel like I just need a *shot in the arm*."

Basket case = slang term for someone who acts in an unusual way/has psychological problems/disruptive personality, eg "I don't speak to my Sister any more, she is a right *basket case*."

I need a physical/check over = request for an examination to check they are well/no diseases present, eg "I've been unwell a few times in the last few months, I think I need a proper *physical*." "I've come for a *check over*."

Shakespeare's phrases

These are a few phrases used today that come from Shakespeare plays:

We have seen better days = We are in poor condition, worn out

Too much of a good thing = Even good things can hurt in excess

I have not slept one wink = I did not sleep at all

It's Greek to me = It's unintelligible, I cannot understand

Wild-geese chase = A hopeless search for something unattainable

Words many people don't understand!

The final thing to be aware of is that many of our medical terms are not understood by people without a science or medical background. So be careful using medical terms that aren't used in every day conversation.

For example, many people use 'acute' and 'chronic' to mean bad. Don't assume a person knows what 'benign' means.

Finally, be careful with abbreviations! If you catch yourself using one think, will the patient know what that means?