

## **Terms on illness and disease**

It is not unusual for ESL students to get confused with the words 'illness' and 'disease'. The following are definitions, collocations (the way words combine in a language to produce natural sounding speech and writing) and usage of 'illness', 'disease', 'condition' and 'disorder'.

**illness** is a general word for a period of not being in good health. It also refers to the state of being physically or mentally ill; or a medical problem or a period of suffering from one. Illness is used to talk about both more severe and more minor medical problems, and those that affect mental health.

example: *He died unexpectedly after a short illness.* or *The doctor asked whether she had a history of any serious illness.*

**disease** is a particular illness with a name, or an illness that affects a particular part of the body. It is often caused by infection. Disease is used to talk about more severe physically medical problems, especially those that affect the organs

example: *Measles is the most devastating of all the major childhood diseases.* or *A healthy diet and regular exercise can help prevent heart disease.*

**disorder**: (rather formal) an illness that causes a part of the body to stop functioning correctly. A disorder is generally not infectious. Disorder occurs most frequently with words relating to mental problems, for example *personality disorder*, *mental disorder* or *eating disorder*.

**condition**: a medical problem that you have for a long time because it is not possible to cure it.

example: *a heart condition* or *Asthma can be a very frightening condition, especially in a child.*

**sickness**: used most often in contexts concerning work and insurance. It is commonly found with words such as *pay*, *leave*, *absence* and *insurance*.

### **Collocations and usage of the words:**

- a **heart, liver, respiratory** disease/disorder/condition
- a **mental, psychological** illness/ disorder/ condition
- to **have, suffer from** a(n) disease/ illness/ disorder/ condition/ sickness
- to **catch, contract, get, pick up** a(n) disease/ illness
- to **carry, pass on, spread, transmit** a(n) disease/ illness
- **chronic, long-term** illness/ sickness
- a **bout** of illness/ sickness

You can **have** any illness or disease: *I'm warning you--I've got a bad cold.* or *Have the kids had chickenpox yet?*

**Get** can be used with disease or illness that you often have: *He gets really bad hey fever every summer.*

**Suffer from** is used in more formal contexts and with more serious diseases: *This medicine is often recommended for patients who suffer from arthritis.*

Now study the differences between the words on treatment:

**diagnose** - to say exactly what an illness or the cause of a problem is

**examine** - to look at something or somebody closely to see if there is anything wrong or to find the cause of a problem

**heal** - to become healthy again; to cure somebody who is ill

**cure** - to make a person or an animal healthy again after an illness

**operate** - to cut open somebody's body in order to move a part that has a disease or to repair a part that is damaged

**look after** - to take care of somebody who is very young, very old, or sick or something that needs keeping in good condition

**treat** - to give medical care or attention to a person, an illness, an injury, etc.

**treatment** - something that is done to cure an illness or injury, or to make somebody look and feel good

you can **take** *medicine / pills / tablets*

you can **have** or **undergo** *an operation / surgery / a transplant / treatment / therapy*