

Real Talk #039 – How to pick up medicine at the pharmacy

Episode description

Do you often visit the pharmacy during flu season? In this Real Talk episode, Andrew and Kassy introduce useful phrases and vocabulary that are heard at the pharmacy.

Fun fact

The popular fizzy beverages Coca-Cola, Dr Pepper, and ginger ale were all invented by three different pharmacists in the late 1800s.

Expressions included in the study guide

- Just living [one's] life
- Symptoms and side effects (drowsiness, nausea, swelling)
- Clear up
- Dairy products
- Dose
- To fight off [something]



Transcript

Note: The words and expressions that appear in **bold text** within the transcript are discussed in more detail in the Detailed Explanations section that follows the transcript. The transcript has been edited for clarity.

Andrew: Hello, everyone. My name is Andrew.

Kassy: And I'm Kassy.

Andrew: And you are listening to Culips.

Andrew: This is Real Talk by Culips, the series where we teach you the English expressions you need to know for real-world situations. Today, we're going to teach you about how to pick up and buy medicine at a drugstore or when visiting the pharmacy.

Andrew: You can get the study guide for this episode on our website, Culips.com. And it's really the best way to study with us here today. In the study guides, you'll get a transcript, detailed vocabulary explanations and definitions, real-life examples, a comprehension quiz, and more. So visit Culips.com to give it a download.

Andrew: And helping me today with this episode is my cohost Kassy. Kassy, hello.

Kassy: Hello. How's it going?

Andrew: I'm doing pretty well, Kassy. How about you?

Kassy: Yup. **Just living my life.**

Andrew: It's Friday today, though.

Kassy: Yes. It's amazing. TGIF. Thank God it's Friday.

Andrew: Some people say Friyay. Friyay!

Kassy: Ah, like celebration. Yay.

Andrew: Friyay! Yeah.

Andrew: Anyway, Kassy, let's get into today's lesson. We are going to teach all of our listeners phrases and expressions that they need when visiting a drugstore to pick up medication. OK, now the focus is not necessarily on how to ask for medication, but how to understand and interpret the instructions that you receive from the pharmacists, OK? So you know how when you buy medicine at the drugstore, the pharmacist will tell you some instructions, how to take the medicine so that you don't die, right?

Kassy: It's very important.

Andrew: Or get sicker than you already are. So what we'll do here today, everyone, is we're going to listen to some example conversations between a customer and a pharmacist at the drugstore. And after we listen to each example conversation, then Kassy and I will go back through that conversation and talk about some of the important English that was used to make that conversation successful. Sound good?

Kassy: Sounds great.

Andrew: All right. So let's start by listening to the first example conversation.

Customer: Hello, I'm here to pick up my prescription. I'm Mark Flint.

Pharmacist: Ah, yes, Mr. Flint. Here's your prescription. You should take these pills twice a day, once in the morning and once in the evening until they're all gone.

Customer: Will they make me feel **drowsy**?

Pharmacist: Only at night to help you sleep. Make sure to avoid taking pills on an empty stomach.

Customer: OK. I'll make sure to eat beforehand. Thank you.

Kassy: OK. So in this first conversation, the customer, Mark, asks the pharmacist for his prescription, his medicine. The pharmacist gave him the medicine and the instructions on how to take it. And then when she was giving the instructions on his prescription, the pharmacist often uses, like, a certain pattern to introduce how to use that medicine. For example, a certain time period or how many times a day. So in this dialogue, the pharmacist says he should take some pills twice a day, in the morning and in the evening.

Andrew: And, Kassy, let's listen to that part of the conversation another couple of times.

Pharmacist: You should take these pills twice a day, once in the morning and once in the evening until they're all gone. You should take these pills twice a day, once in the morning and once in the evening until they're all gone.

Kassy: This information could be substituted for any different time period. Andrew, can you give some examples?

Andrew: Yeah, so maybe a pharmacist would say something like you should take a spoonful of medicine every 8 hours or you should take 10 milliliters of this medicine every 8 hours if this was, like, a cough syrup or a liquid medicine. Or maybe they'll say something like you should take the tablets once a day for 6 days. Really, just telling you the amount and how frequently you need to consume the medicine, right?

Kassy: Yes. And then another thing that was mentioned were words related to **side effects** of said medicine. The pharmacist mentioned that his medication might cause him to feel **drowsy**, tired.

Andrew: **Drowsy**, sleepy, right? Yeah, and there are unfortunately many different **side effects** that can come from taking medicine, right? You could be **drowsy**. You could get a headache.

Kassy: **Nauseous**.

Andrew: **Nauseous**, you could have a dry mouth, or the opposite, you could start sweating. There are lots of different **side effects**. And, actually, all you need to do to know about all the **side effects** of medicine, guys, is watch American daytime TV and you'll see commercials for medicine and they tell you all the **side effects**.

Kassy: Those commercials are the best.

Andrew: It's always a shock for me, as a Canadian, because I think it's illegal to advertise medicine on Canadian TV, but it's not in America. So when I watch American TV and see American TV commercials, I'm always shocked because, maybe our listeners don't know, but they have to, legally, list all of the **side effects** that may occur with that medication in the commercial. But many medications have many possible **side effects**. So at the end of the commercial, you get somebody speaking very, very quickly to try and list all of the different **side effects**.

Kassy: Yes, but they have to do it with a smile, like they're happy about it. So they're saying, with a big smile, they say things like this medication could cause rashes, severe seizures, death. It's really ridiculous, actually.

Andrew: Right. Yeah. But that's maybe a topic for a different episode. Let's get back to the content at hand here. The final thing that we should mention, maybe, from this example conversation was the pharmacist who said that you should avoid taking the pills on an empty stomach. This is something that you are very likely to hear the pharmacist tell you: don't take your pills on an empty stomach. And taking something on an empty stomach means having an empty stomach, right? Not eating first. Let's listen to that part of the conversation another couple of times.

Pharmacist: Make sure to avoid taking pills on an empty stomach. Make sure to avoid taking pills on an empty stomach.

Kassy: Yes, you should always take your pills during or directly after eating a meal.

Andrew: Yeah, usually. Of course, there might be some medicine where you want to take it on an empty stomach, but.

Kassy: That's true.

Andrew: They'll often tell you don't take it on an empty stomach.

Andrew: All right, Kassy, why don't we listen to another example conversation, again between a customer and a pharmacist?

Kassy: OK.

Customer: Hello. Have you got anything for a sore throat?

Pharmacist: Yeah, of course, these pills should help. You can take up to two at a time every 8 hours until the pain goes away.

Customer: Do I need to eat something before I take them?

Pharmacist: It's not necessary, but make sure to avoid eating spicy food and **dairy products** until your **symptoms** subside. If it doesn't **clear up** after a few days, then you should go see a doctor.

Andrew: All right. So in this conversation that we just heard, a customer went to the drugstore to buy some medicine for a sore throat and the pharmacist recommended some pills that would help make the pain go away. And we heard some interesting vocabulary in this conversation. The pharmacist said that the patient should keep taking the pills until the **symptoms** subside. Let's listen to that part of the conversation another couple of times.

Pharmacist: Make sure to avoid eating spicy food and **dairy products** until your **symptoms** subside. Make sure to avoid eating spicy food and **dairy products** until your **symptoms** subside.

Andrew: What does this mean, Kassy, until the **symptoms** subside?

Kassy: Subside means kind of disappear, go away. So she should keep taking the medicine until all of her **symptoms** disappear.

Andrew: Right. So it's probably like this in every language, but there's jargon that's used when you talk to a doctor or a healthcare provider. They use, you know, some words that are kind of only used to talk about the body and medicine, and subside is used in other contexts of English, as well, but it's really frequently used when talking about **symptoms**. We call it a collocation. It's a word that is always kind of partnered with this word **symptoms** is the word subside.

Kassy: I think another interesting phrase in this example was the last sentence: If it doesn't **clear up** after a few days, you should go see a doctor.

Pharmacist: If it doesn't **clear up** after a few days, then you should go see a doctor. If it doesn't **clear up** after a few days, then you should go see a doctor.

Andrew: **Clear up** is just another way to say subside, right? We especially use **clear up** to talk about skin issues. It can be used to talk about other medical issues as well, but if you have a rash or acne or any kind of skin issue, if that goes away, then we say it cleared up. If your sore throat **symptoms** also subside and go away, then they also **clear up**.

Andrew: So I think what we'll do now is talk about some other key vocabulary that you're probably going to need to know to have a successful trip to the pharmacy and back. The first one that I wanted to highlight here, Kassy, is **dose**, D-O-S-E, **dose**. What is a **dose**?

Kassy: **Dose** is the amount of a certain medication that you're taking. So, for example, like a **dose** of Tylenol.

Andrew: Right. So it could also refer to the strength of the medicine, right? So maybe you have a prescription medicine that has, for example, 5 milligrams of strength, that would be a 5-milligram **dose**. Or you could have 10 milligrams, that would be a 10-milligram **dose**. So it refers to the quantity and the strength of the medicine.

Andrew: Now this one is really, really important, when just talking about medicine, in general. It is antibiotics, antibiotics.

Kassy: Yeah, literally anti-bacteria. So **fighting off** bacteria in the body.

Andrew: So if you have some sort of bacterial attack or infection, then the doctor will probably prescribe antibiotics to help **clear up** that bacterial problem that you have.

Andrew: All right. Another kind of medicine is an itch cream, an itch cream.

Kassy: Yeah, this comes in handy in the summertime, when you might come across a bunch of mosquitoes or poison ivy.

Andrew: Right. Or maybe if you have a spider bite or even, who knows, it could be maybe you have a skin problem like a rash or something. Then an itch cream will help you soothe the itching sensation, right? So soothe means calm and subside. And, of course, an itch is just that annoying feeling that you get on your skin, right?

Kassy: You need to scratch it.

Andrew: You need to scratch it. Yes, scratch an itch. Actually, this is something that I hear native speakers confuse sometimes. Sometimes they'll say, oh, I need to itch this. I need to itch this, but it's really scratch it. Scratch an itch. Even native speakers get this confused sometimes.

Andrew: The next word that I wanted to talk about is anti-inflammatory, anti-inflammatory. What is an anti-inflammatory? What kind of medicine is this?

Kassy: So anti-, the prefix is the same as in antibiotics. It's, like, get rid of, minus, OK? And then inflammatory means when your skin **swells** up and gets really red, usually due to infection. So an anti-inflammatory medicine would help reduce the **swelling** and puffiness in your body.

Andrew: Yeah, word geeks will notice that that word inflammatory has flam in the middle, which is like flame, right? So you can imagine some part of your body flaming up and becoming really irritated and painful. And so an anti-inflammatory medicine will help reduce that kind of inflammation.

Andrew: Well, everyone, that brings us to the end of today's Real Talk episode. Thank you for listening. We hope that you learned a lot here with us today. Just to recap, we learned about some situational English expressions that you can use next time you have to buy medicine at a pharmacy and understand what the pharmacist tells you, understand the pharmacist's instructions.

Kassy: Check out our website, Culips.com, if you want to get the transcript and practice exercises for this episode. You can go to the website to download the study guide.

Andrew: All right, and you can also follow us on social media. We are really all over the place. We're on Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, Twitter. If you search for the Culips English Podcast, you will be able to find us very easily. And if you would like to get in contact with us, maybe you have a question that you'd like to ask or have a topic suggestion for an upcoming episode, then just shoot us an email. Our address is contact@Culips.com. We will be back soon with another brand-new episode and we'll talk to you then. Goodbye.

Kassy: See you around.

Detailed Explanations

Just living [one's] life

Phrase

In this episode, Andrew asks Kassy how she is doing and she replies by saying, “**Just living my life.**” In response to Andrew’s question, **just living my life** means that Kassy is doing well and isn’t doing anything particularly special; she is just living one day at a time.

A similar phrase, **to live [one's] own life**, means to live the way that one wants to, regardless of what others want or wish. For example, when a child grows up and moves out of the house, he finally has a chance **to live his own life** without following the rules his parents had while he lived under their roof.

Here are a couple more examples with **just living [one's] life**:

Kyle: Hey, Matty. Are you doing better since the breakup? You look better than the last time I saw you.

Matty: Yeah, I’m doing better. I was pretty heartbroken, huh?

Kyle: You totally were. Have you started dating again?

Matty: No, I’ve decided to focus on myself for a bit before I try dating again. I’m **just living my life** and figuring out what I want in the future.

Kyle: I’m proud of you, man. If you ever need anything, don’t be afraid to ask.

Matty: Thanks.

Jessie: I’m sick of **just living my life** with every day the same as the day before. I think I need a change.

Vera: Like what? You could get a puppy or start doing yoga or something.

Jessie: I was thinking something bigger, like a 3-month backpacking trip or running a marathon.

Vera: But you hate running!

Jessie: That’s not the point! It’s about trying new things!

Symptoms and side effects (drowsiness, nausea, swelling)

Nouns

Symptoms are the feelings and reactions your body has to different illnesses, while **side effects** are the feelings and reactions your body has to different medicines used to combat those illnesses. There are many different kinds of **symptoms and side effects**, but here are three discussed in the episode:

To feel **drowsy** or to have **drowsiness** is to be extremely sleepy. **Drowsiness** is a common **side effect** of certain medications.

To feel **nauseous** or to have **nausea** is to feel sick and like you may vomit. **Nausea** is caused by lots of things, from illness to motion sickness to taking medicine on an empty stomach.

If something **swells up** or becomes **swollen**, then it becomes larger and rounder in size due to infection, inflammation, or some other medical problem. For example, bee stings often cause body parts to **swell up** to a larger size because the sting inflames the skin.

Here are a couple more examples with **symptoms and side effects (drowsiness, nausea, swelling)**:

Marco: Ugh. Why did you make me ride that roller coaster? I feel so **nauseous**.

Vinny: Oh, c'mon, it was fun! You gotta live a little.

Marco: You know roller coasters make me vomit. Maybe we could pick an exciting activity that doesn't make me wanna do that. How about paintball?

Vinny: Excellent idea! I'll look online to see if they have coupons we can use.

Marco: OK. While you do that, I'm gonna go find a trash can to throw up in.

Vinny: Good luck, buddy!

Alexandra: Oh my goodness! Sarah, are you OK? Your face is **swelling up** like a balloon.

Sarah: Yeah, I don't feel so good. What did you say were in these cookies again?

Alexandra: Umm ... You know, pretty basic things: eggs, flour, sugar, butter, cinnamon.

Sarah: Cinnamon? Alexandra, I'm allergic to cinnamon!

Clear up

Phrasal verb

If someone's illness or other medical condition heals or starts to disappear, then it **clears up**. For example, if someone has severe acne on their face, they might try to take medicine to **clear it up**. In other words, they will take medicine, hoping that it will make the acne disappear.

Clear up is often used to refer to minor symptoms or illnesses that appear and can be cured easily with rest and some medicine. For example, you wouldn't use the phrase **cleared up** to describe a broken leg that is healed. However, you could use **cleared up** to describe a sore throat that went away after a few days of rest and medication.

Here are a couple more examples with **clear up**:

Babs: Ugh. I've tried everything, but I just can't get this damn pimple to go away!

Maria: Here, let me get my facial cleanser. You can borrow it for a few days. I had a nasty pimple the other day, too, and this stuff **cleared it right up**.

Babs: Thanks, girl. I really hope it works. I'm sick of looking at this pimple on my face!

Maria: Ha! It doesn't look that bad.

Justin: Hey, has your cold **cleared up** yet?

Dante: Yeah, mostly. Why?

Justin: Wanna go to the basketball game with me later?

Dante: Mmm, sure. I think I'm up for it.

Justin: Great! I'll drive by your house around 6:00.

Dante: Yup, see ya.

Dairy products

Noun

Dairy products are food products that come from a cow, such as milk, cheese, yogurt, butter, and ice cream. **Dairy products** sometimes make symptoms worse or have a bad effect on medication, so pharmacists often tell customers to refrain from eating **dairy products** until their symptoms clear up.

Here are a couple more examples with **dairy products**:

Vivi: I've decided to become completely vegan now.

Kaley: So what does that mean, exactly?

Vivi: It means that, on top of being a vegetarian, I also can't eat or use any **dairy products**.

Kaley: Whoa, so that means you're not allowed to eat things like ice cream or chocolate anymore? I would literally die if I tried that.

Vivi: I can eat those things. I just have to have special vegan ice cream or chocolate made from soy milk or coconut milk or something like that.

Martin: Ugh, I feel super nauseous.

Trevor: Well, why did you eat that giant plate of alfredo pasta even though you're lactose intolerant? Maybe you shouldn't eat that stuff, since you're allergic to **dairy products**.

Martin: But it tastes so good!

Trevor: Yeah, but I'm allergic to peanuts and you don't see me torturing myself trying to eat peanut butter.

Martin: It's different. If you eat a peanut, you could die. If I eat a little bit of cheese once in a while, I just get severe stomach pain and diarrhea. The deliciousness is worth the pain.

Trevor: If you say so ...

Dose

Noun

A **dose** is a quantity of medicine prescribed to be taken at a certain time. For example, when taking cough medicine, people are often allowed two or three **doses** a day. A **dose** is like a serving size of medicine; it is just the amount necessary to help deal with the symptoms of an illness at any given time.

Here are a couple more examples with **dose**:

Tristan: I'm down to my last **dose** of cough syrup. Do you mind picking up some more for me on your way home today?

Reggie: Yeah, sure. No problem. Is there a specific size you want?

Tristan: No, just get the same bottle as this one.

Reggie: OK, sounds good.

Dalia: Oh my goodness, are you OK? How many **doses** of sleep medication did you take? You were asleep for hours and hours!

Carl: I don't know. Like three?

Dalia: Three? At one time? Are you crazy?

Carl: It's fine. I woke up, right? No harm, no foul. I just really needed some sleep. The stress has been keeping me awake for days.

Dalia: Well, warn me next time you decide you know better than the doctors and overdose on your sleeping medication! I wanna be prepared, at least!

To fight off [something]

Phrasal verb

To fight off [something] means to try to not get sick. Getting sick can cause a lot of inconveniences for someone's life, so people often try to **fight off their colds** before they get worse through various methods such as drinking lots of fluids, increasing vitamin C intake, or getting lots of extra sleep.

Here are a couple more examples with **to fight off [something]**:

Hyeji: Why are you chugging orange juice like that?

Minju: My throat felt a little funny this morning. I cannot get sick right now! The most important test of my life is in 2 days. I gotta **fight off this thing** before it turns into a full-blown cold.

Hyeji: OK, I'll go buy you some zinc tablets. Those are supposed to help **fight off colds**, as well.

Minju: Thanks. I appreciate it.

Doctor: What seems to be the problem?

Vashti: Hello, Doc. I've been trying to **fight off this infection** for weeks, but the rash keeps coming back.

Doctor: Have you tried the medicines I've recommended in the past?

Vashti: Yeah, they work for a few days, but then it comes back worse than ever.

Doctor: OK, I'm going to recommend this other drug. It's a bit pricey, but it's powerful.

Vashti: If it can make this rash go away, I'll pay anything.

Doctor: OK, take this slip to the pharmacy and they'll tell you what to do. I wish you well.

Vashti: Thanks, Doc!

Quiz

1. Which of the words below is NOT a symptom?

- a) drowsiness
- b) nausea
- c) croaks
- d) swelling

2. Which is an example of a dairy product?

- a) broccoli
- b) yogurt
- c) pheasant
- d) paper

3. Which word goes in the blank in the following sentence? If you take this medicine, your sore throat should _____ up in a few days.

- a) lift
- b) break
- c) give
- d) clear

4. True or false? The phrase I'm just living my life means that I want to change my life because I feel depressed about it.

- a) true
- b) false

5. Which of the following words means an amount of medicine taken at any one time?

- a) dose
- b) serving
- c) sample size
- d) extract

Writing and Discussion Questions

1. What are pharmacies like in your country? Are they different than pharmacies you've been to in other countries? How so?
2. Have you ever taken medicine that gave you strange side effects? What were they?
3. What was the worst illness you've ever had or pain you've ever experienced? What kind of medicine or treatment did you receive to get better?
4. What is your favourite type of dairy product and why?
5. Do you have a strong immune system? Is your body good at fighting off colds and other illnesses? Give details.

Quiz Answers

1.c 2.b 3.d 4.b 5.a

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