

The most difficult part of the examination is time maintenance. The examination must be completed in 15 minutes. You must make the optimum use of your time. It is important that you use appropriate transition sentences and ask open-ended questions as noted below.

Introduction and greeting:

- "Hello Mr. XYZ. Good morning or good afternoon. I am Dr. XYZ. It's nice to meet you (shake hand).

Technique one (HPI last method):

Starting with the past medical history first allows one to get the patient's background history and gives clues for what to focus on in the HPI.

Chief complaint: Start by asking the patient why they are here today.

- "Can you please tell me what we can do for you today?"

Plan for interview:

- "Before we continue, I would first like to get a little background information about you so that I know what to focus on with your present problem."

Start with past medical history

- "What medical conditions has a doctor diagnosed you with in the past, such as diabetes or high blood pressure?"

****Tip: It is best not to use medical words such as hypertension but simple English, such as high blood pressure, to keep the interview as a fluid conversation.***

- "Have you been hospitalized for any medical problems in the past?"
- "Have you seen a psychiatrist before or been diagnosed with any psychiatric conditions?"

Female patients

- "How many pregnancies have you had?"
- "How many children do you have?"
- "Were they natural deliveries?"
- "Were there any complications?"

Past Surgical History

- "What operations have you had in the past?"

Medications

- "What medications are you taking that a doctor has prescribed for you?"
- "What vitamins or supplements are you taking over-the-counter that a doctor has not prescribed for you?"

Allergies

- "What medications are you allergic to?"
- "What allergic reaction does the medicine cause?"
- "Are you allergic to anything in the environment or any food?"
- "What reaction do you get?"

Family history:

- ***Use transition sentences** - "I would like to ask you about your family's medical conditions."
- "How old is your father? What medical conditions does (or did) he have?"
- "How old is your mother? What medical conditions does (or did) she have?"
- "How many brothers do you have? Do any of them have any medical conditions?"
- "How many sisters do you have? Do any of them have any medical conditions?"

Social History:

***Transition sentence:** "I would like to now ask you about your living situation."

- "Who do you live with at home?"
- "What kind of work do you do?"

Tobacco use

- "Do you smoke?"
- If yes, "what age did you start smoking?"
- "How much do you smoke and for how many years?"

Alcohol intake

- "Do you drink alcohol or beer?"
- If yes, "how many drinks do you have at one time when you drink?"
- "What age did you start drinking?"

***Tip: Always keep in mind about the CAGE questionnaires for suspected alcohol abuse cases (ex. upper GI bleeding, right upper quadrant pain, epigastric pain).**

- *"Have you ever tried to cut down on alcohol drinking?"*
- *"Have you ever been annoyed by other people for your drinking?" or "Have you ever annoyed other people by your drinking?"*
- *"Have you ever had guilty feelings about your alcohol drinking?"*
- *"Do you drink alcohol early in the morning?"*

Illegal drug use

- "Have you used any illegal drugs in the past?"
- "What did you use?"
- "When did you start?"

- "When did you stop?"
- "Have you had any blood transfusions? Have you had any tattoos?"

History of present illness (HPI)

***Transition sentence** - "Now that I have your background, I will now focus on what brings you in today."
After this, ask open ended questions: "Tell me more about the chest pain."

Ask the following components of the chief complaint in the HPI

Location

- "Show me where the problem is?"
- "Point with one finger where it hurts."

Onset and duration- Always ask for the onset and duration of the problem so you can know whether the problem is acute, subacute, or chronic.

- "When did it first start?"
- "How long does it last?"

Intensity- One should always ask about the intensity or severity of the problem, especially if the complaint is pain.

- "On a scale of 1-10, with 1 being the least painful and 10 being the most painful, which number would describe your pain?" or "How would you grade your pain on a scale of 1-10?"

Quality

- "Describe the pain."
- "What does it feel like?"
- "Is it sharp?"

Frequency

- "How many times a day are you having the symptom?"
- "Is it constant or happening on and off?"

Radiation

- "Does it move anywhere?"

Aggravating factors

- "What makes it worse?"

Alleviating factors

- "What makes it better?"

Associated symptoms

- "I want to ask you about other symptoms that you may be having."

**Tip: Ask the relevant associated symptoms with the chief complaint*

General Review of Systems (ROS) - brief overview

General:

- "Do you have fever or chills?"
- "Have you lost any weight?"

Skin:

- "Have you had any rashes or changes in skin color?"
- "Have you noticed any easy bruising?"

HEENT:

- "Do you have any vision or hearing problems?"
- "Do you have any headache or dizziness?"
- "Do you have any nasal discharge or obstruction?"
- "Do you have any difficulties swallowing?"
- "Have you had any sore throat?"

Cardiac:

- "Do you have any chest pain?"
- "Do you feel that your heart races or goes fast?"

Pulmonary:

- "Have you had any cough? If so, are you coughing anything up?"
- "What color is the sputum? Is there any blood?"
- "Have you had any shortness of breath?"

Gastrointestinal:

- "Have you had any nausea or vomiting?"
- "Have you had any constipation or diarrhea?"
- "Have you had any abdominal pain?"

Genitourinary:

- "Have you had to go to the bathroom more often?"
- "Does it burn when you urinate?"
- "Do you have blood in the urine?"

Musculoskeletal:

- "Do you have any weakness in your legs or arms?"
- "Do you have any pain in your joints?"

Neurologic:

- "Do you have numbness or tingling?"
- "Have you passed out at all?"

Technique 2 (HPI first method)

This is the same as above except starting with the HPI first and then proceeding with the past medical history onwards. The Review of Systems would be performed at the end of the history.

Summary and plan of action

- In both techniques, always summarize the history with the patient. Standardized patients are usually on the lookout for this.
- Always list a plan of action. Standard patients many times will ask for this or look for you to explain this.
- "Let me make sure that I have the correct details. You were well until 5 days ago when you started having fever, chills, cough with yellow sputum, and shortness of breath. You started taking ibuprofen and Mucinex without relief. I am concerned about the following things that could be going on- pneumonia, bronchitis, etc... I would like to do the following next steps to help figure out what could be going on."