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ARTICLES WITH NAMES OF SYMPTOMS AND DISEASES

Most symptom names require an article (a, an, the) or another determiner to identify or quantify the noun.


↓

✓ I have **a toothache**.

✓ My child has **asthma**.

↑

As a general rule, do not use “a”, “an”, or “the” before names of illnesses or diseases.



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Articles With Names of Symptoms and Diseases

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Because most **symptom names** are countable, they usually require an article (a/the) or another determiner to identify or quantify the noun.

I had **a severe toothache** last week.

Omit the article, however, to speak about a symptom or health condition **in a general sense**.

Stomachaches can be caused by a range of different factors, including constipation, indigestion, and appendicitis.

As a general rule, do not use “a”, “an”, or “the” before **names of illnesses or diseases**.

My child has **appendicitis**.

But there are **exceptions**. For example, you can include the article “the” with a number of traditional diseases, such as the flu, the measles, or the chickenpox, specially in informal situations.

My whole family has **the flu**.

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1. Articles With Symptom Names

1.1 Countable Names (Colds, Sore throats, Headaches, etc.)

Most names of symptoms and self-diagnosed conditions are countable, so we say **a cold, a sore throat, a headache**, etc.

I had **two headaches** last month.

My child had **five colds** last year.

Singular countable nouns are generally preceded by an article (a, an, the) or another determiner (this, that, my, your, his, etc.).

My sister has **a sore throat**.

Resting in a quiet, dark place can help ease **your headache**.

When naming a specific group or collection of **colds, sore throats, headaches**, etc., add a determiner (the, most, many, all, those, their, etc.) to identify or quantify the noun.

Many headaches are caused by lack of sleep.

Avoid the determiner when using a symptom name in a general sense.

Sore throats are very common and generally nothing to worry about.

This is a partial list of **symptoms and conditions that take a/an**:

- [Allergy](#)
- [Backache](#) *(The article can be omitted in British English.)*
- [Cold](#)
- [Cough](#)
- [Cramp/Muscle Cramp](#) *(The article can be omitted in British English.)*
- [Earache](#) *(The article can be omitted in British English.)*
- [Fever](#) *(The article can be omitted in British English.)*
- [Headache](#)
- [Heart attack](#)
- [Runny nose](#)
- [Sore throat](#)
- [Stomachache](#) *(The article can be omitted in British English.)*
- [Stroke](#)
- [Toothache](#) *(The article can be omitted in British English.)*

1.2 Names that Are Both Countable and Uncountable (Pain and Migraine)

The nouns [pain](#) and [migraine](#) can be both countable and uncountable; thus, you can say:

I have **a pain** in my arm.

I have **pain** in my arm.

When it comes to describing your **pain** or **migraine**, the more precise you are in terms of location, frequency, intensity, etc., the more likely you will use the indefinite article a/an.

My wife has **an excruciating pain** in her stomach.

1.3 Countable Names that Can Also Be Uncountable in British English (Fever, Stomachache, Earache, Backache, Toothache)

In British English, most aches ([stomachache](#), [toothache](#), [earache](#), [backache](#), etc.) can be both countable and uncountable; therefore, you can optionally omit the article.

I've got **stomachache**.

“**Headache**” is an exception to this practice.

My husband has **a headache**.

My husband **has headache**.

In American English, aches are countable nouns.

My child has **a toothache**.

I had **three stomachaches** last month.

The word “**fever**” has the same optionality in British English.

Olivia has **fever**.

Fever is a rise in body temperature.

In American English, the noun “**fever**” is always countable, and we normally say “**have a fever**”.

My wife has **a fever**.

His fever is too high.

Some fevers cannot be explained.

The expressions “**have a temperature**” or “**be running a high temperature**” implies that someone’s temperature is just above normal.

Last night John **had a temperature** and went to bed early.

By contrast, expressions like “**have a fever**”, “**treat a fever**”, “**bring down a fever**”, etc. suggest that the temperature is significantly higher.

Rebecca didn’t go to work because she **had a fever**.

2. Articles With Disease Names

Medical names for diseases are uncountable (**diabetes, lupus, cancer**, etc.); consequently, we do not use the article “a” or “an” with them.

My niece has **lupus**.

However, there are a number of traditional folk names of diseases that can be preceded by the article “the” (**the flu, the measles, the chickenpox**, etc.), particularly in informal situations.

2.1 Diseases and Conditions

Most diseases and illnesses are uncountable.

I have **diabetes**.

I have **the diabetes**.

I have **a diabetes**.

Thus, use the singular form to talk about a particular condition in a general sense.

What causes **high blood pressure**?

Possessive pronouns (my, your, his, her, our, your, their) can be added to introduce someone's disease

John seemed in good shape despite **his diabetes**.

Follow the same convention with the following health conditions:

- [Amnesia](#)
- [Appendicitis](#)
- [Arthritis](#)
- [Asthma](#)
- [Cancer](#)
- [Conjunctivitis](#)
- [Constipation](#)
- [Dementia](#)
- [Depression](#)
- [Diabetes](#)
- [Diarrhea](#)
- [Dizziness](#)
- [Eczema](#)
- [Epilepsy](#)
- [Gonorrhea](#)
- [Hypertension / High blood pressure](#)
- [Nausea](#)
- [Parkinson's / Parkinson's disease](#)
- [Pneumonia](#)
- [Vomiting](#)

My brother has **appendicitis**.

I have **breast cancer**.

A disease name can also be an adjective. In this case, use the articles (a, an, or the) or another determiner (most, fewer, some, many, etc.) according to the usual rules.

Counseling may help **some cancer patients** with depression.

2.2 Traditional Folk Names of Diseases

Typically used in informal language, the article “the” can precede certain names of traditional diseases, such as **the flu**, **the chickenpox**, **the measles**, and **the clap**.

My sister has **the chickenpox**.

I had **the flu** last month.

Flu is short for [influenza](#). We typically use the noun **influenza** (without “the”) in formal situations or professional contexts.

Influenza is a viral infection that attacks your respiratory system.

The influenza is a viral infection that attacks your respiratory system.

This is a partial list of traditional diseases that can be used with the article “the”:

- [The chickenpox](#)
- [The clap](#) (*slang*)
- [The flu](#)
- [The grippe](#) (*old-fashioned word for the flu*)
- [The measles](#)
- [The mumps](#)

3. Other Health Conditions (Tumors, Warts, Growths, Sore foot, etc.)

The following names of symptoms and health conditions are usually preceded by an article or another determiner:

- **a tumor**
- **a wart**
- **a growth**
- **a sore foot, a sore back**, etc.

It's **a tumor** in the spinal cord.

But do not include the article when using these words in a general sense.

Not all people who have **a tumor** have the same symptoms.

4. Can You Use ‘Having’ Followed by a Health Condition?

When talking about a health condition, the verb “have” cannot be used in the continuous tense.

I have a **backache**.

I’m having a **backache**.

This particular construction (having + health condition) can work, however, with the plural form of a symptom to discuss a frequency reading.

My child has been **having many sore throats** last month.

You can use the continuous tense with other verbs, like “treat”, “suffer”, “experience”, “recover”, etc.

Are you **suffering from fever**?

She is **recovering from an acute stomachache**.