Step 1: Read the following passage about how doctors diagnose patients.

The process of diagnosis disease in patients involves several steps that allow a doctor or healthcare professional to collect information. In this lesson, we will walk through those steps to help you understand how diagnoses are made.

What is a Diagnosis?

Individuals who are sick or injured in some way will go see a doctor because doctors are trained medical professionals who can diagnose what is wrong. The diagnosis is the identification of a disease, disorder, or other condition that a patient may have that is causing their symptoms.

Diagnoses are sometimes very easy to come by, while others may be a bit trickier. In order to make a good diagnosis the doctor will go through a process that involves several steps, allowing them to gather as much information as possible.

Below are a list of the steps involved in making a correct diagnosis:

Step 1: The Medical History

The first thing the doctor will do when someone comes to their office is get their complete medical history. This involves collecting information about any past and current symptoms, any diseases that their family members may have, and collecting any other information that may be helpful such as medications the individual is taking. You might think that lab tests and other diagnostic tools would be more important than a patient’s medical history, but the family history may carry important clues the doctor might need.

The doctor will also ask the patient about how they are feeling, how long they have been feeling that way, and any external influences that may be factors. This information gives the doctor a good foundation from which to move forward.

Step 2: The Physical Exam

After talking with the doctor, they will want to examine the individual physically. This includes collecting your vital signs like the patient’s blood pressure, pulse, and temperature. These measurements can provide a lot of information to the doctor. The doctor may also listen to an individual’s lungs and heart with a stethoscope, feel or palpate parts of their body like the lymph nodes and abdomen, test the reflexes, use percussion or tapping to listen to sounds in
the individual’s body, look at their eyes, ears, and mouth, and examine any other places they think may be important.

This physical exam allows the doctor to see, feel, and test the patient’s body to find out what is abnormal and what hurts (if they are experiencing pain). It is very important for the individual to let the doctor know where they are experiencing symptoms so that they can more closely examine those specific parts of the body and collect more information for their diagnosis.

**Step 3: Performing Diagnostic Tests**

The next step in the diagnostic process is to run some tests. Usually by step 3 the doctor already has a good idea of what the diagnosis is. The tests are simply to confirm the diagnosis. Other times however, the doctor may not be quite sure and the tests are used to rule out certain diagnoses to narrow down the field of possible options.

What kinds of test the doctor decides to run depends on the symptoms and the suspected diagnosis. Bloodwork is often one of the first tests ordered, as this will provide the doctor with a great deal of information about how organs in the body are functioning. Other tests include imaging tests such as MRI’s (Magnetic Resonance Imaging), x-rays, ultrasounds and CT scans that gives the doctor a close look inside the body.

**Step 4: Drawing Conclusions**

Once all the tests are complete, the exam is over and the medical history has been taken into consideration, the doctor is in a better position to make an accurate diagnosis and suggest treatments for what is ailing the patient. There are occasions when a doctor is unable to diagnose what is wrong with their patient and they need to order additional tests or call other doctors in to assist with the diagnosis. In difficult cases, a team of doctors work together in the diagnosis and treatment of a medical problem.

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Respond to the questions below using the information from the passage.

1. Why is the medical history of a patient important for a doctor to consider?
   
   ____________________________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________

2. List three vital signs that a doctor would collect during a physical exam.
   
   ______________________  ______________________  ______________________
3. If a patient comes in to see a doctor because they were not feeling well, what would be two of the first questions that the doctor should ask their patient:

Question 1:
__________________________________________________________________________

Question 2:
__________________________________________________________________________

4. In your opinion, why would it be important for a patient to be honest with the doctor about their symptoms?
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________

5. What is a step that a doctor would take to confirm their diagnosis after they complete the physical exam?
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________

6. A _________ test helps the doctor determine how well the body organs are functioning.

7. Two other tests that may be ordered include a ____________ or a __________________.

8. Number the steps in the correct order that they occur.

   _____ The doctor orders tests to confirm the diagnosis.
   _____ The patient’s medical history is collected.
   _____ An individual feels ill and visits the doctor for help.
   _____ The doctor performs a physical exam including taking the patient’s vital signs.
   _____ Treatment for the diagnosis is provided to the patient.
   _____ The doctor determines what is wrong with the patient.