



# How to describe being ill in French

KS4 FRENCH

MODERN LANGUAGES

Ages 13-16 ⌚ 3 min read

## The basics: saying you're ill

When you want to tell someone in **French** that you're not feeling well, the easiest phrase is "**Je suis malade**" (literally "I am ill"). But there are lots of other ways to describe exactly what's wrong with you, depending on your symptoms.

Another common way to say you're ill is "**Je ne me sens pas bien**", which means "I don't feel well." This is useful if you want to sound a bit more polite or less dramatic.

Think of it like having different ways to tell your mum you're unwell – you might say "I feel sick" or "I don't feel right" – **French** speakers do exactly the same thing with different phrases.

## Describing specific symptoms

The clever part is using "**avoir**" (to have) with body parts to describe what hurts. For example, "**J'ai mal à la tête**" means "I have a headache" – literally "I have pain at the head." You can swap "**la tête**" (the head) for other parts: "**J'ai mal au ventre**" (stomach ache), "**J'ai mal à la gorge**" (sore throat), or "**J'ai mal aux dents**" (toothache).

Some illnesses need different words. A **fever** is "**une fièvre**" or "**la température**", and you'd say "**J'ai de la fièvre**" (I have a fever). A **cough** is "**une toux**", and "**J'ai une toux**" means you have a cough.

Think of it like building blocks – you're using the same structure ("J'ai mal à...") and just swapping in different body parts, like changing characters in a game.

## Talking to a doctor or pharmacist

If you need to visit a **doctor (un médecin)** or **pharmacist (un pharmacien)** in a **French-speaking** country, you might hear them ask "**Qu'est-ce que vous avez?**" (What's wrong with you?). You can answer with any of the phrases above, or say "**J'ai vomi**" (I've been sick) or "**Je suis fatigué(e)**" (I'm tired).

Other useful phrases include "**Je dois rester au lit**" (I need to stay in bed) and "**Je prends des médicaments**" (I'm taking medicine). These help explain your situation clearly so you get the right help.

## Why learn this?

Being able to describe how you feel in another language is super practical. Whether you're on holiday, at a **French** exchange school, or chatting with **French-speaking** friends online, knowing these phrases means you can get help quickly and communicate clearly about your health.