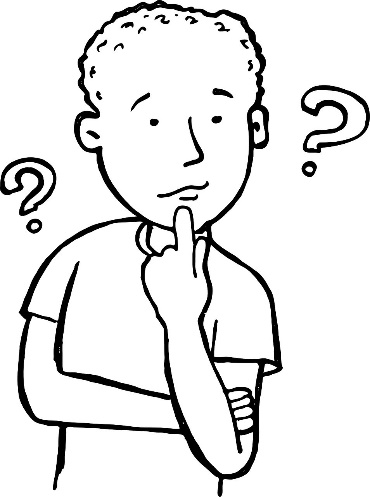
**Defining health**



Some children were asked to write down what they think health is.

Their answers are shown in the table.

Tick **one** box for each answer.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Answers** | | I am **sure** this is right | I **think** this is right | I **think** this is wrong | I am **sure** this is wrong |
| **1** | Health just means you are physically fit. |  |  |  |  |
| **2** | Your health is how many diseases you’ve got. |  |  |  |  |
| **3** | Health is how well your body is working. |  |  |  |  |
| **4** | If you are healthy you can do more of the things you want and need to do. |  |  |  |  |
| **5** | Health is how well you can cope with life, physically and emotionally. |  |  |  |  |

*Biology > Big idea BHD: Health and disease > Topic BHD1: What are health and disease? > Key concept BHD1.1: Good and ill health*

|  |
| --- |
| **Diagnostic question** |
| **Defining health** |

**Overview**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Learning focus: | The physical health and the mental health of an organism can range from good to ill, and are affected by numerous factors. |
| Observable learning outcome: | Evaluate definitions of health. |
| Question type: | Confidence grid |
| Key words: | Health, disease |

**What does the research say?**

Definitions of health have long been debated. The World Health Organisation’s definition states that (good) health “is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity” (World Health Organization, 2006). It has been suggested that the definition of (good) health be shifted away from the absence of disease, towards an emphasis on an individual’s ability to function and cope with physical, emotional, environmental and social challenges (Huber, Knottnerus and Green, 2011).

Children’s understanding of health, and of behaviours associated with good and ill health, changes with their age and developmental stage (Berk, 2000). The ways in which people define health shifts with age; while children and younger people tend to define health in terms of vitality and physical strength, older people relate health to physical functions and ability to cope with everyday life.

Ill health (or “illness”) can be defined as deviation from the ‘normal’ appearance, functions and behaviour of an organism, although defining ‘normal’ and what constitutes a deviation from it even for an individual organism is not necessarily straightforward (Boruchovitch and Mednick, 2002).

The misunderstanding that health only relates to physical health, and in particular physical *fitness*, is common. When the children aged 9-11 in the US were asked to define health, their answers mostly referred to disease (causes and cures), followed by weight gain and loss, and ideas about balanced diet (Reeve and Bell, 2009). A study in Shanghai (Wang et al., 2014) found that when children aged 15-20 were asked to define health, their definitions commonly included the idea that only when people are healthy can they do everything they want and need to do. A study of teachers from a large number of schools in Italy found that they most commonly defined health as the absence of disease, followed by ideas about psycho-physical efficiency, balance, and absence of stress (Miglioretti et al., 2013).

**Ways to use this question**

Students should complete the confidence grid individually. This could be a pencil and paper exercise, or you could use the PowerPoint presentation with an electronic voting system or mini white boards.

*Differentiation*

You may choose to read the statements to the class, so that everyone can focus on the science. In some situations it may be more appropriate for a teaching assistant to read for one or two students.

**Expected answers**

1. Health just means you are physically fit – **wrong** (although physical fitness is one aspect of health, a person’s health depends on much more than this)
2. Your health is how many diseases you’ve got – **wrong** (although the presence and absence of disease is one aspect of health, a person’s health depends on much more than this)
3. Health is how well your body is working – **wrong** (although normal functioning of the body is one aspect of health, a person’s health also depends on their emotional and mental wellbeing)
4. If you are healthy you can do more of the things you want and need to do – **right**
5. Health is how well you can cope with life, physically and emotionally – **right** (this is a broader definition of health, encompassing physical and mental wellbeing in the social context of ability to cope with life’s challenges)

**How to respond - what next?**

After students have indicated their answers, you may choose to follow up with structured class discussion. Ask one student to explain why they gave the answer they did; ask another student to explain why they agree with them; ask another to explain why they disagree, and so on. This sort of discussion gives students the opportunity to explore their thinking and for you to really understand their learning needs. Responses often work best when the activities involve paired or small group discussions, which encourage social construction of new ideas through dialogue.

If students have misunderstandings about ways in which health can be defined, the following BEST ‘response activity’ facilitates the exploration of ideas through small group discussion of the World Health Organization’s definition of health, and could be used in follow-up to this diagnostic question:

* Response activity: What is health?

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Developed by Alistair Moore (UYSEG).

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