

# How to Take Care of a Sick Person

CHAPTER

# 4

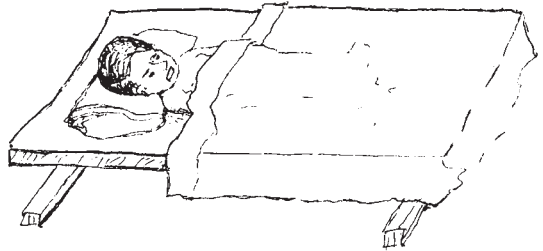
Sickness weakens the body. To gain strength and get well quickly, special care is needed.

**The care a sick person receives is frequently the most important part of his treatment.**

Medicines are often not necessary. But good care is always important. The following are the basis of good care:

## 1. The Comfort of the Sick Person

A person who is sick should rest in a quiet, comfortable place with plenty of fresh air and light. He should keep from getting too hot or cold. If the air is cold or the person is chilled, cover him with a sheet or blanket. But if the weather is hot or the person has a fever, do not cover him at all (see p. 75).



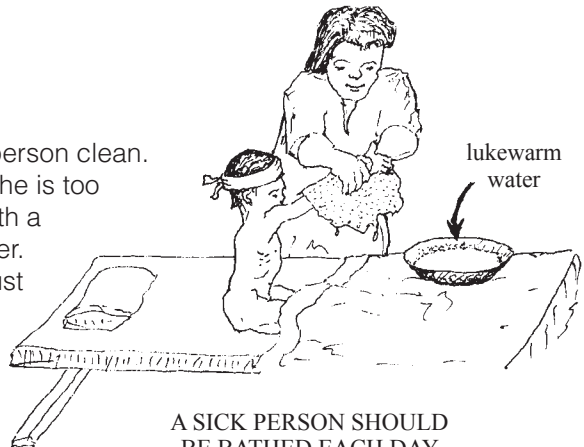
## 2. Liquids



In nearly every sickness, especially when there is fever or diarrhea, the sick person should drink plenty of liquids: water, tea, juices, broths, etc.

## 3. Personal Cleanliness

It is important to keep the sick person clean. He should be bathed every day. If he is too sick to get out of bed, wash him with a sponge or cloth and lukewarm water. His clothes, sheets, and covers must also be kept clean. Take care to keep crumbs and bits of food out of the bed.



**A SICK PERSON SHOULD BE BATHED EACH DAY**

## 4. Good Food

If the sick person feels like eating, let him. Most sicknesses do not require special diets.

A sick person should drink plenty of liquids and eat a lot of nourishing food (see Chapter 11).

If the person is very weak, give him as much nourishing food as he can eat, many times a day. If necessary, mash the foods, or make them into soups or juices.

Energy foods are especially important—for example, porridges of rice, wheat, oatmeal, potato, or cassava. Adding a little sugar and vegetable oil will increase the energy. Also encourage the sick person to drink plenty of sweetened drinks, especially if he will not eat much.



A few problems do require special diets. These are explained on the following pages:

anemia . . . . .	p. 124
stomach ulcers and heartburn . . . . .	p. 128
appendicitis, gut obstruction, acute abdomen (in these cases take no food at all) . . . . .	p. 93
diabetes . . . . .	p. 127
heart problems . . . . .	p. 325
gallbladder problems . . . . .	p. 329
high blood pressure . . . . .	p. 125

## SPECIAL CARE FOR A PERSON WHO IS VERY ILL



### 1. Liquids

It is extremely important that a very sick person drink enough liquid. If he only can drink a little at a time, give him small amounts often. If he can barely swallow, give him sips every 5 or 10 minutes.

Measure the amount of liquids the person drinks each day. An adult needs to drink 2 liters or more every day and should urinate at least a cup (240 ml) of urine 3 or 4 times daily. If the person is not drinking or urinating enough, or if he begins to show signs of dehydration (p. 151), encourage him to drink more. He should drink **nutritious** liquids, usually with a little salt added. If he will not drink these, give him a Rehydration Drink (see p. 152). If he cannot drink enough of this, and develops signs of **dehydration**, a health worker may be able to give him intravenous solution. But the need for this can usually be avoided if the person is urged to take small sips often.

## 2. Food

If the person is too sick to eat solid foods, give her soups, milk, juices, broths, and other nutritious liquids (see Chapter 11). A porridge of cornmeal, oatmeal, or rice is also good, but should be given together with body-building foods. Soups can be made with egg, beans, or well-chopped meat, fish, or chicken. If the person can eat only a little at a time, she should eat several small meals each day.

## 3. Cleanliness

Personal cleanliness is very important for a seriously ill person. She should be bathed every day with warm water.

Change the bed clothes daily and each time they become dirty. Soiled or bloodstained clothes, bedding, and towels of a person with an infectious disease should be handled with care. To kill any viruses or germs, wash these in hot soapy water, or add some chlorine bleach.

## 4. Changing Position in Bed

A person who is very weak and cannot turn over alone should be helped to change position in bed many times each day. This helps prevent bed sores (see p. 214).

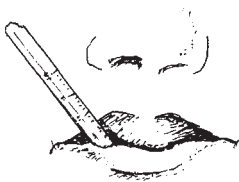
A child who is sick for a long time should be held often on her mother's lap.

Frequent changing of the person's position also helps to prevent pneumonia, a constant danger for anyone who is very weak or ill and must stay in bed for a long time. If the person has a fever, begins to cough, and breathes with fast, shallow breaths, she probably has pneumonia (see p. 171).

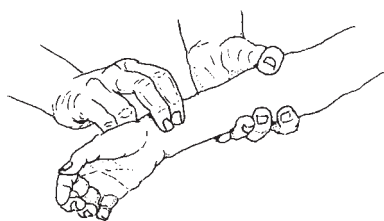
## 5. Watching for Changes

You should watch for any change in the sick person's condition that may tell you whether he is getting better or worse. Keep a record of his vital signs. Write down the following facts 4 times a day:

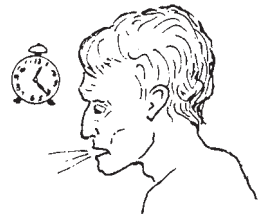
temperature  
(how many degrees)



pulse  
(beats per minute)



breathing  
(breaths per minute)



Also write down the amount of liquids the person drinks and how many times a day he urinates and has a bowel movement. Save this information for the health worker or doctor.

It is very important to look for signs that warn you that the person's sickness is serious or dangerous. A list of **Signs of Dangerous Illness** is on the next page. If the person shows any of these signs, **seek medical help immediately.**



## SIGNS OF DANGEROUS ILLNESS



A person who has one or more of the following signs is probably too sick to be treated at home without skilled medical help. His life may be in danger. **Seek medical help as soon as possible.** Until help comes, follow the instructions on the pages indicated.

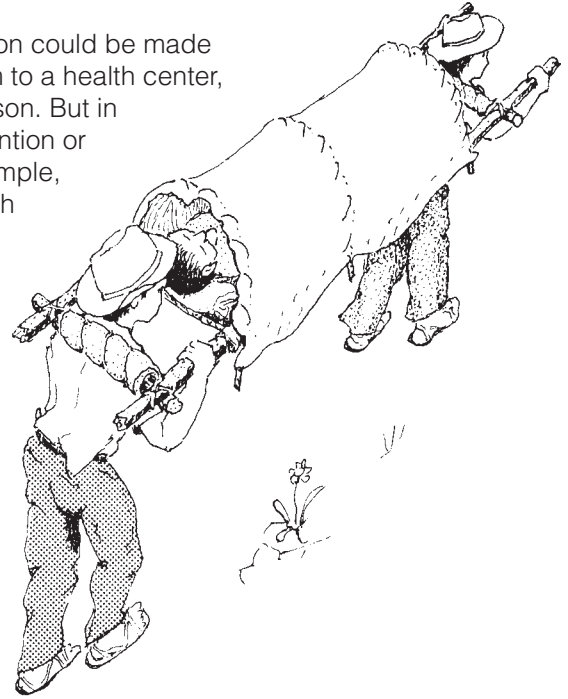
	page
1. Loss of large amounts of blood from anywhere in the body . . . . .	82, 264, 281
2. Coughing up blood . . . . .	179
3. Marked blueness of lips and nails (if it is new) . . . . .	30
4. Great difficulty in breathing; does not improve with rest . . . . .	167, 325
5. The person cannot be wakened (coma) . . . . .	78
6. The person is so weak he faints when he stands up . . . . .	325
7. Twelve hours or more without being able to urinate . . . . .	234
8. A day or more without being able to drink any liquids . . . . .	151
9. Heavy vomiting or severe diarrhea that lasts for more than one day or more than a few hours in babies . . . . .	151
10. Black stools like tar, or vomit with blood or feces . . . . .	128
11. Strong, continuous stomach pains with vomiting in a person who does not have diarrhea or cannot have a bowel movement . . . . .	93
12. Any strong continuous pain that lasts for more than 3 days . . . . .	29 to 38
13. Stiff neck with arched back, with or without a stiff jaw . . . . .	182, 185
14. More than one seizure (fit) in someone with fever or serious illness . . . . .	76, 185
15. High fever (above 39°C) that cannot be brought down or that lasts more than 4 or 5 days . . . . .	75
16. Weight loss over an extended time . . . . .	20, 400
17. Blood in the urine . . . . .	146, 234
18. Sores that keep growing and do not go away with treatment . . . . .	191, 196, 211, 212
19. A lump in any part of the body that keeps getting bigger . . . . .	196, 280
20. Very high blood pressure (180/110 or greater) . . . . .	327
21. Problems with pregnancy and childbirth:	
any bleeding during pregnancy . . . . .	249, 281
high blood pressure (140/90 or greater) . . . . .	249
long delay once the waters have broken and labor has begun . . . . .	267
severe bleeding . . . . .	264

## WHEN AND HOW TO LOOK FOR MEDICAL HELP

Seek medical help at the first sign of a dangerous illness. Do not wait until the person is so sick that it becomes difficult or impossible to take him to a health center or hospital.

If a sick or injured person's condition could be made worse by the difficulties in moving him to a health center, try to bring a health worker to the person. But in an emergency when very special attention or an operation may be needed (for example, appendicitis), do not wait for the health worker. Take the person to the health center or the hospital at once.

When you need to carry a person on a stretcher, make sure he is as comfortable as possible and cannot fall out. If he has any broken bones, splint them before moving him (see p. 99). If the sun is very strong, rig a sheet over the stretcher to give shade yet allow fresh air to pass underneath.



## WHAT TO TELL THE HEALTH WORKER

For a health worker or doctor to recommend treatment or prescribe medicine wisely, she should see the sick person. If the sick person cannot be moved, have the health worker come to him. If this is not possible, send a responsible person who knows the details of the illness. Never send a young child or someone who cannot explain the problem.

Before sending for medical help, examine the sick person carefully and completely. Then write down the details of his disease and general condition (see Chapter 3).

On the next page is a form on which you can make a PATIENT REPORT. Several copies of this form are at the end of this book. Tear out one of these forms and carefully complete the report, giving all the details you can.

**When you send someone for medical help,  
always send a completed information form with him.**

**PATIENT REPORT**

TO USE WHEN SENDING FOR MEDICAL HELP

Name of the sick person: \_\_\_\_\_ Age: \_\_\_\_\_

Male \_\_\_\_\_ Female \_\_\_\_\_ Where is he (she)? \_\_\_\_\_

What is the main sickness or problem right now? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

When did it begin? \_\_\_\_\_

How did it begin? \_\_\_\_\_

Has the person had the same problem before? \_\_\_\_\_ When? \_\_\_\_\_

Is there fever? \_\_\_\_\_ How high? \_\_\_\_\_°

When and for how long? \_\_\_\_\_

Pain? \_\_\_\_\_ Where? \_\_\_\_\_ What kind? \_\_\_\_\_

**What is wrong or different from usual in any of the following?**

**Skin:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Ears:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Eyes:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Mouth and throat:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Genitals:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Urine:** Much or little? \_\_\_\_\_ Color? \_\_\_\_\_ Trouble urinating? \_\_\_\_\_

Describe: \_\_\_\_\_ Times in 24 hours: \_\_\_\_\_ Times at night: \_\_\_\_\_

**Stools:** Color? \_\_\_\_\_ Blood or mucus? \_\_\_\_\_ Diarrhea? \_\_\_\_\_

Number of times a day: \_\_\_\_\_ Cramps? \_\_\_\_\_ Dehydration? \_\_\_\_\_

Mild or severe? \_\_\_\_\_ Worms? \_\_\_\_\_ What kind? \_\_\_\_\_

**Breathing:** Breaths per minute: \_\_\_\_\_ Deep, shallow, or regular? \_\_\_\_\_

Difficulty breathing (describe): \_\_\_\_\_

Cough (describe): \_\_\_\_\_

Wheezing? \_\_\_\_\_ Mucus? \_\_\_\_\_ With blood? \_\_\_\_\_

**Does the person have any of the SIGNS OF DANGEROUS ILLNESS** listed on page 42? \_\_\_\_\_ Which? (give details) \_\_\_\_\_

**Other signs:**

Is the person taking medicine? \_\_\_\_\_ What? \_\_\_\_\_

Has the person ever used medicine that has caused a rash, hives (or bumps) \_\_\_\_\_ with itching, or other allergic reactions? \_\_\_\_\_ What? \_\_\_\_\_

The state of the sick person is: Not very serious: \_\_\_\_\_ Serious: \_\_\_\_\_

Very serious: \_\_\_\_\_