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CHAPTER

4

HOW TO TAKE CARE
OF A SICK PERSON

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HOW TO TAKE CARE OF A SICK PERSON

Sickness weakens the body. Special care is needed to gain strength and get well quickly.

The care a sick person receives is often 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. 87).



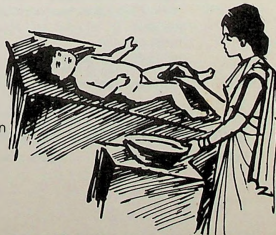
2. Liquids

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 body-building and nourishing foods like dal, beans, green leafy vegetables, fruits and milk. If possible try to eat eggs, meat, fish and chicken. Milk is very good as it contains the substances the body needs (see chapter 11).

If the person is very weak, give him these same foods, but make them into soups or juices.

Energy foods are also important—for example, porridges of rice, wheat, corn, maize and ragi. 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:

stomach ulcers and heartburn	p 149
appendicitis, gut obstruction, acute abdomen (in these cases take no food at all)	p 106
diabetes	p. 149
heart problems	p. 371
gallbladder problems	p. 375
Urinary tract infection in children	p. 357

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 3 or 4 times daily. If the person is not drinking or urinating enough, or if he begins to show signs of dehydration (p. 181) encourage him to drink more. He should drink *nutritious* liquids, usually with a little salt added. If he will not drink these, give him Rehydration Drink (see p. 182). 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 food, give him soups, curds, lassi, dal water, vegetable soup, lime juice, coconut water and other nutritious liquids. (See chapter 11).

A porridge of rice, wheat dalia, suji or ragi is also good, but should be given together with body building foods. Soups can be made with green leafy vegetables, beans, eggs, well chopped meat, fish or chicken. If a person can eat only a little at a time, he should eat several small meals each day.

3. Cleanliness and Changing Position in Bed

Personal cleanliness is very important for a seriously ill person. He should be bathed every day with warm water. Change the bed clothes daily and each time they become dirty.

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. 255).

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

requent 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, he probably has pneumonia (see p. 208).

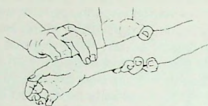
4. Watching for Changes

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 . . .	95, 310, 327
2. Coughing up blood	219
3. Marked blueness of lips and nails (if it is new).	36, 92, 204, 371
4. Great difficulty in breathing; does not improve with rest	204, 371
5. The person cannot be wakened (coma)	90
6. The person is so weak he faints when he stands up	371
7. A day or more without being able to urinate.	278
8. A day or more without being able to drink any liquids.	181
9. Heavy vomiting or severe diarrhea that lasts for more than one day or more than a few hours in babies	181
10. Black stools like tar, or vomit with blood or feces.	150
11. Strong, continuous stomach pains with vomiting in a person who does not have diarrhea or cannot have a bowel movement.	106

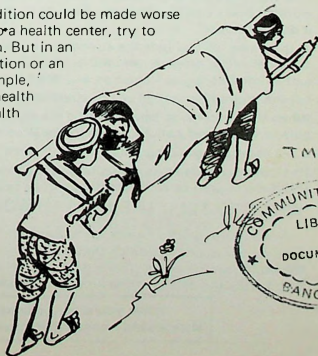
12. Any strong continuous pain that lasts for more than 3 days	35	44
13. Stiff neck with arched back, with or without a stiff jaw	222	225
14. More than one fit (convulsions) in someone with fever or serious illness	88	224
15. High fever (above 39° C) that cannot be brought down or that lasts more than 4 or 5 days	88	
16. Weight loss over an extended time		28
17. Blood in the urine		278
18. Sores that keep growing and do not go away with treatment	232	238
	252	253
19. A lump in any part of the body that keeps getting bigger	238	326
20. Problems with pregnancy and childbirth:		
any bleeding during pregnancy	295	327
swollen face and trouble seeing in the last months		295
long delay once the waters have broken and labor has begun		313
severe bleeding		310

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.112). If the sun is very strong, rig a sheet over the stretcher to give shade yet allow fresh air to pass underneath.



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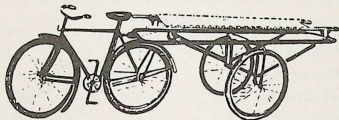


A BICYCLE AMBULANCE

You can make a simple, inexpensive bicycle ambulance for your village. It is not necessary to purchase a bicycle. You can use one that belongs to someone who is helpful in your village.

Materials:

- two thick wooden or bamboo poles 2½ metres long
- strong canvas or other cloth 2¼ metre long and 90 cms wide
- one sheet to cover the patient
- a metal or heavy bamboo or wooden frame to hold the stretcher—2 metre 35 cms long and 56 cms wide
- canvas strips 7 cm wide and at least 1 metre 80 cms long
- a pair of bicycle wheels fitted into a metal frame Your village blacksmith can make this.



one metal ring welded on the rear frame of the bicycle
 one L-shaped piece of metal fastened to the front of the rack which carried the stretcher. This will fit into the metal ring of the bicycle and will hitch the bicycle to the stretcher.

Instructions:

Fold the long ends of the cloth on both sides and stitch it well, so that the bamboo or wooden poles can fit into them. Be sure to stitch very well with strong thread so it does not open.

In the frame which holds the stretcher, cut deep grooves so that the handles of the stretcher will fit properly, and will not fall off when the bicycle moves. You may also tie the handles to the frames as an added precaution.

Lift the injured person on to the stretcher as shown on page 113 and 114

When the stretcher is secure on the frame, cover the person with a sheet. Tie the person with broad canvas bands to the stretcher.

Drive carefully, avoiding jolts and short turns.

This type of ambulance is particularly useful if the health centre or hospital is very far, and if the injured or sick person has to be taken immediately for medical help.

WHAT TO TELL THE HEALTH WORKER

For a health worker or doctor to recommend treatment or prescribe medicine wisely, he 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 small child or a fool.**

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

The book *Where There Is No Doctor* is available at Rs 29/- plus postage. Multiple copies of reprints of various chapters are also available.

Please write to:

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