

HOW TO LOOK AFTER SOMEONE WHO IS ILL

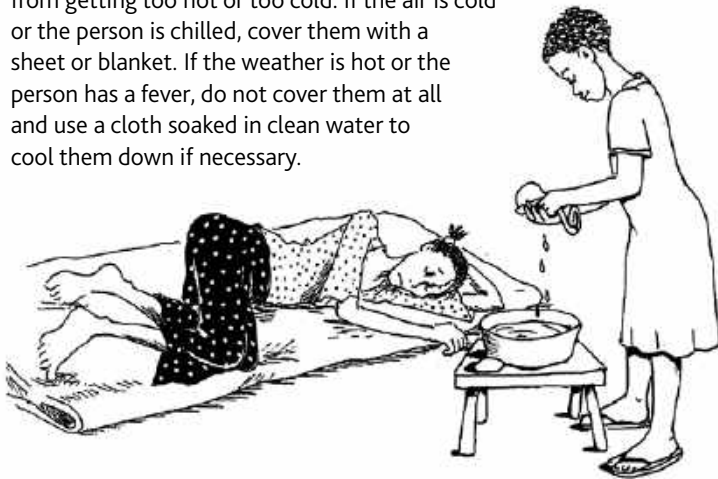
Sickness weakens the body. To help someone who is ill gain strength and get well quickly, special care is needed. The care a sick person receives is frequently the most important part of their treatment.

If you are caring for someone who is unwell, remember to look after your own needs too. Wash your hands thoroughly with soap before and after helping them, eat regular meals and make sure you get enough rest. Ask for help if you need it.

The following points provide the basis of good care for anyone who is unwell.

REST

A person who is sick should rest in a quiet, comfortable place with plenty of fresh air and light. Keep them from getting too hot or too cold. If the air is cold or the person is chilled, cover them with a sheet or blanket. If the weather is hot or the person has a fever, do not cover them at all and use a cloth soaked in clean water to cool them down if necessary.



GOOD FOOD

A sick person should drink plenty of liquids and eat nourishing food. If the person is very weak, give them small amounts of food, several times a day. If necessary, mash food up or make it into soups or juices.



Foods that are high in energy are especially important, for example porridges of rice, wheat, oatmeal, potato or cassava. Adding a little sugar and vegetable oil will increase the energy. Protein is also important such as eggs, beans, fish and meat.

If the sick person is unable to eat much, increase their energy intake by offering them sweetened drinks.

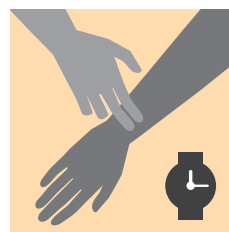
WATCH FOR CHANGES

Watch for any changes in the sick person's condition that may tell you if they are getting better or worse. Make a record of the three facts to the right, four times a day.

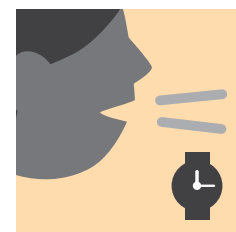
Also write down the amount of liquid the person drinks and how many times a day they urinate and have a bowel movement. Save this information for the health worker or doctor.



Temperature
(how many degrees)



Pulse
(beats per minute)



Breathing
(breaths per minute)

It is very important to look for signs that warn you that the person's illness is serious or dangerous. If you see any of the signs in the box on page 21, seek medical help straight away. Do not wait until the person is so ill that it becomes difficult or impossible to take them to a health centre or hospital. Their life may be in danger.



POSITION

A person who is very weak and cannot turn over should be helped to change position in bed many times each day. This helps prevent sores developing on their body.

Frequent changes of position also help 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, they may have pneumonia and will need medical help.



PERSONAL CLEANLINESS

It is important to keep the sick person clean. They should be bathed every day. If they are too ill to get out of bed, wash them with a sponge or cloth and warm water. Their clothes, sheets and covers must also be kept clean. Take care to keep crumbs and bits of food out of the bed.

Soiled or bloodstained clothes, bedding and towels of a person with an infectious disease should be handled with care. To kill any viruses or other germs, wash these in hot soapy water or add some chlorine bleach.

SIGNS OF A DANGEROUS ILLNESS



- Loss of large amounts of blood from anywhere in the body
- Coughing up blood
- Marked blueness of lips and nails
- Great difficulty in breathing; does not improve with rest
- The person cannot be woken up (coma)
- The person is so weak they faint when they stand up
- Twelve hours or more without being able to urinate
- A day or more without being able to drink any liquids
- Heavy vomiting or severe diarrhoea that lasts for more than one day or more than a few hours in babies
- Black stools like tar, or vomit with blood or faeces
- Strong, continuous stomach pains with vomiting in a person who does not have diarrhoea or cannot have a bowel movement
- Any strong continuous pain that lasts for more than three days
- Stiff neck with arched back, with or without a stiff jaw
- More than one seizure (fit) in someone with fever or serious illness
- High fever (above 39° C) that cannot be brought down or that lasts more than four or five days
- Weight loss over an extended time
- Blood in the urine
- Sores that keep growing and do not go away with treatment
- A lump in any part of the body that keeps getting bigger
- Very high blood pressure (220/120 or greater)
- Complications with pregnancy or childbirth

LIQUIDS



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

If in doubt about how safe the water is, boil it for two minutes and let it cool before giving it to the patient to drink. Giving unsafe water to someone who is ill could make them much worse.

Article adapted from Chapter 4 of Where there is no doctor (2015 edition), pages 39–41. See page 22 for more details.