

Who Does It

Ease winter cold miseries

Nothing makes a winter week gloomier than having everyone home with flus and colds and general mumbering miseries.

The family nurse, who's probably down with it herself, begins to perceive life as an unending succession of trays, loads of laundry, and complaints. Well, says Anne Graham of St. John Ambulance, there are some things you can do to help, beginning with keeping the worry to a minimum. Chances are you don't need a doctor, but if you think you do, call one.

You should probably check in with the doctor if your flu victim is very young, or aging or has some chronic problem that could make a flu serious.

Mrs. Graham says you should also call the doctor if your patient has a temperature of 38.5 or higher for longer than 48 hours, or if a high temperature is combined with vomiting or diarrhoea.

"Use a strip thermometer to take temperatures if you have trouble reading a standard thermometer. You don't have to sterilize them."

Mrs. Graham is an area nursing officer with the St. John Ambulance Brigade, and instructor in their home health care course.

First, look after the people who are still up and around, especially the nurse. Rest when you can, properly, and avoid the family germs as much as possible.

"Supply all the ill with lots of tissues, and paper bags for the used ones. Wash your hands every time you think about it, especially after cleaning up the paper bags."

Washing hands means, thoroughly, between the fingers and over the wrists, and remember, rings and bracelets can carry germs.

"Give your patients lots of fluids, and don't just stick to orange juice, or they'll get tired of it. There's a lot to be said for grandmother's chicken soup. Warm soup is very comforting."

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Mrs. Graham, who is a registered nurse, says her classes are "Most interested in aspects of illness and ages and stages. The thing I've thought for years about home health care is that the care is given by non-professionals who are alone. They need support. It's anxiety producing. People worry about doing the wrong thing."

Egg Nog is nourishing and appetizing. "If your little kids won't drink enough, try making popsicles out of fruit juice."

Whatever you do about food and drinks, keep them simple, not only because that will appeal to the patients, but because it should keep down the work for the nurse. Provide small quantities of comfortable food as attractively as possible. This is no time for heavy meals.

Keep the house as steamy as you can, Mrs. Graham suggests. Use your humidifier and steamers, and pans of water on the radiator. Everybody will breathe a little easier. Be sure they're in safe places, 'though, especially if you have small children.

If your patients are in bed, freshen things up for them once or twice a day. Give them an extra pillow and an extra blanket or two so they can prop up or lie on top of the bed. While you're tidying the bed, bundle up your patient in a chair or in another room for a few minutes while you air the bedroom, or get them to use the time washing and freshening up.

Keep them supplied with reading material or puzzles or knitting and a radio, once they start to feel better. Normally healthy people, particularly the kids, will enjoy being up and around, as long as they aren't overdoing, or out spreading germs.

The St. John Ambulance course Mrs. Graham teaches is available from St. John anywhere. It teaches home nursing skills that can be useful to any family. It covers specific skills, general knowledge, safety, good health care practices.

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