Rheumatic Fever

A complication of untreated strep throat is an inflammation which affects the entire body. This is called Rheumatic fever. Rheumatic fever is most common in children between the ages of 5 and 15 years. It can develop in adults. Rheumatic fever can damage the heart and affect the joints, central nervous system, skin, and the underlying tissues. Most cases of strep throat do not lead to rheumatic fever when properly treated. Even without treatment, only a few cases will develop rheumatic fever. There is no cure for rheumatic fever. Prompt treatment of strep infections with antibiotics will prevent it. Life long heart damage resulting from rheumatic fever is called rheumatic heart disease.

SYMPTOMS

Problems in Rheumatic fever commonly show up within a few weeks after a strep throat infection. Some of these symptoms are:

- Fever.
- Chest pain.
- Abdominal pain.
- Shortness of breath.
- Painless nodules under the skin.
- Shortness of breath.
- Heart irregularities.
- A rash.
- Joint pain which moves around and is usually in the elbows, wrists, ankles and knees intermittently.
- Swelling, warmth, and redness of the joints.
- *Chorea* (rapid, uncoordinated jerky movements of the facial muscles, hands and feet.)

DIAGNOSIS

Your caregiver often will suspect the diagnosis based on exam after a recent sore throat or an upper respiratory infection. Blood tests may be done to confirm the diagnosis when there is evidence of a previous strep infection.

COMPLICATIONS

Severe problems of rheumatic fever involve the heart. These problems come from the damage done to the heart valves. The most common problems are from an inflammation of the heart (*endocarditis*), mitral stenosis, and *aortic stenosis* (a narrowing of the aortic valve). With mitral and aortic stenosis, the narrowed valves makes it harder for the heart to pump blood. This may lead to heart failure and an irregular heartbeat.

HOME CARE INSTRUCTIONS

- Gargle with warm salt water, 3 to 4 times per day or as instructed for comfort.
- Family members with a sore throat or fever should have a medical examination or throat culture. If there has been a positive throat culture in the family, your caregiver may treat the rest of the family.
- You may return to work when you feel able.
- Only take over-the-counter or prescription medicines for pain, discomfort, or fever as directed by your caregiver.

SEEK MEDICAL CARE IF:

- There is an oral temperature above 102º F (38.9º C) lasting 2 days or more not controlled by medication.
- Large glands develop in the neck.
- A rash, cough, or earache develop.
- You or your child cough up green, yellow-brown, or bloody sputum.
- There is pain or discomfort not controlled by medications.
- *Symptoms* (problems) seem to be getting worse rather than better.

SEEK IMMEDIATE MEDICAL CARE IF:

- New symptoms develop such as vomiting, severe headache, a stiff or painful neck, chest pain, shortness of

breath, or breathing or swallowing trouble.

- You or your child develop severe throat pain, drooling, or changes in the voice.

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