

## ***Empowering Patients: Symptoms and Screening Tests***

***The Review of Systems is a system-by-system review of symptoms and asks key questions that may indicate underlying disease.*** Depending on your response, your doctor will ask further questions and may perform an examination to help determine the cause of your symptoms.

### ***General Symptoms***

- Has there been a change in your energy level?
- Have you gained or lost weight?
- Have you had increased hunger or thirst?
- How is your sleep?

### ***Neurological Symptoms***

- Are you having headaches? *Progressive symptoms with any changes in behaviour or function require prompt medical attention.*
- Do you have dizziness (light-headedness or vertigo)? *Persistent vertigo or vertigo associated with other neurological symptoms requires medical attention.*
- Do you have any numbness or altered sensations?
- Have you had memory problems?

**Neurological emergencies: a seizure** (a temporary loss of consciousness usually associated with involuntary movements) **or a stroke** (Symptoms might include the sudden appearance of neurological symptoms, such as weakness, numbness, loss of speech, loss of vision, severe imbalance or behavioural changes).

### ***Head and Neck Symptoms***

- Having you had any hearing loss? Have you had tinnitus (ringing in the ears)?
- Do you have difficulty breathing through your nose? *This may be due to allergies, septal deviation, foreign bodies or tumours.*
- Have you been bothered by nosebleeds?
- Have you had double vision?
  - *A sudden loss of vision is an emergency. It may indicate a stroke or a retinal detachment.*

### ***Musculoskeletal Symptoms***

- Have you had swelling or stiffness of any joints?
- Have you had locking or decreased range of motion in any joint?

### ***Cardiovascular Symptoms***

- Have you had chest (neck, throat or arm) pain or pressure? Do you get palpitations?
- Do you have pain in your calves when walking? *When relieved by rest, this might indicate poor arterial circulation in your legs.* Do you have painful swelling in one leg? *This may be an infection or a blood clot that requires prompt attention.*
- Do you have shortness of breath with exertion?
  - The classic symptoms of heart failure: shortness of breath with exertion or lying down, swelling of the feet and legs and weight gain due to fluid retention.

### ***Respiratory Symptoms***

- Are you having difficulty breathing? Do you wheeze? Have you been coughing? Have you coughed up blood?

### Urinary Symptoms

- Do you have difficulty with urination (decreased flow, increased frequency, problems with bladder control or pain)?
- Do you have blood in the urine?

### Genital Symptoms

- Have you had pelvic pain? Are periods irregular, heavy or painful? Have you had abnormal vaginal bleeding or spotting?
- Do you have any groin or genital sores, swelling or growths?

### Gastrointestinal Symptoms

- Do you have difficulty swallowing? Do you have heartburn? Have you been vomiting? (red blood or coffee grounds?) Have you had increased gas, constipation or diarrhea? Have you had a change in your bowel movements?
- Has there been a change in the caliber of your stools? *Pencil-thin or flattened stools may indicate a colon cancer or an abnormal mass in the abdomen.* Have you seen blood in your stools? *This may appear bright red, but when bleeding from an ulcer is digested it produces melena – black, tarry stools.*

### ALARM SYMPTOMS

These symptoms may indicate serious conditions that require immediate medical attention.

- A. **PAIN** that is unexplained, severe, colicky, electrical or persistent; *chest pain*, especially if it is squeezing or associated with sweating, nausea or spreading to the neck, throat or arm; *bone pain*, especially if it is unremitting and disturbs sleep.

- B. **LOSS OF FUNCTION:** Unexplained changes in your speech, memory, emotions, swallowing, bowel movements, urination, heart rhythm, vision, hearing, balance, coordination, sensation or muscle function.
- C. **CONSTITUTIONAL:** Unexplained sudden or progressive changes in weight, energy, appetite, body temperature, thirst, leg swelling and exercise tolerance.
- D. **GROWTHS:** New or growing lumps felt in the skin, mouth, muscle, breast or scrotum; lymph nodes felt around the neck and under the arms; skin changes, including ugly moles, persistent scabs or sores.
- E. **BLEEDING:** in urine, sputum, stools or vomit; abnormal bruising.

### The Four Foundations of Self Care

- **What you eat** (What you put into your body).
- **What you do** (physical activity and rest).
- **How you feel** (emotional well-being).
- **How you connect** (healthy relationships).

**More articles on Empowering Patients can be found at [FETCH](http://sc.fetchbc.ca) (For Everything That's Community Health) [sc.fetchbc.ca](http://sc.fetchbc.ca)**

**Note:** This article was written by Dr. Davidicus Wong and does not necessarily reflect the opinions of the Sunshine Coast Division of Family Practice

**Please share this information with your family, friends and anyone else who may find it helpful.**

**Together we'll create a healthier community and a healthier future.**