**Knowing When Things Are Getting Serious**

While some people run to the doctor for every cut and scrape, others put off seeing a physician for nagging symptoms that could indicate something serious.

So how do you know? When should you see the doctor?

Sometimes, of course, it's obvious. If you are in unbearable pain or experiencing heavy bleeding or injury, you go to the doctor. Sometimes, though, it's not so obvious. Is that lump a tumor, or just a localized infection? Is this vague, migratory pain something to worry about? Should I see a doctor about this chronic cough?

Let's take a look at some of the symptoms that can be vague enough to cause conflict over seeing a doctor.

**1.) Chronic Coughing**

If you have a cold and a nagging cough that lasts for a week or so, it's probably not a big deal. But prolonged, chronic coughing could be a very serious symptom.

In fact, whooping cough can present in adults as simply a chronic cough that lasts for weeks or even months. So if your cough is very painful, lasts more than a week, or brings up blood, you should see a doctor.

**2.) Nagging or Migratory Pain**

Pain is sometimes a serious symptom, but at other times it's just something like an old injury acting up. Generally speaking, however, living with chronic pain, even if it's bearable, is just not the best way to live life.

If your pain is at an injury site or seems like muscle stiffness or cramps, you might consider seeing a chiropractor. He or she will be able to recognize the source and nature of the pain, and will let you know if it's serious.

Severe, sudden pain should be examined by a doctor, no matter what part of the body is affected.

**3.) Lumps Under the Skin**

If the lump is in your breast, you do not necessarily need to seek medical attention. Monitor the lump and see if it goes away or decreases during your menstrual cycle. This kind of cystic breast activity is normal. But if the lump is persistent and does not change or grows in size, visit your doctor.

Other lumps may or may not be an issue. The key is to monitor it - does the lump stay the same, get bigger, or change color, shape and/or size? If it does any of these things, or develops an infection, see your doctor.

**4.) Weight Gain**

Unexpected weight gain can be more than just a disappointment. If you have not changed your dietary or exercise habits, weight gain could indicate something more serious. Water in the tissues, or edema, is characterized by weight gain as are insulin disorders.

Unexplained weight gain could indicate a poorly functioning thyroid. Therefore, see your doctor if you gain weight for no apparent reason and your attempts at losing it fail.

**5.) Weight Loss**

Unfortunately, many people welcome weight loss as a good thing and neglect to recognize that it could be a serious symptom. Cancer, hyperthyroidism, and liver disease are all characterized by weight loss.

If you have not made any significant dietary or exercise changes, or if you are actually eating more and exercising less and still losing weight, see your doctor.