Hemophilia

What is hemophilia?

- Hemophilia is an inherited bleeding problem. People with hemophilia do not bleed any faster than normal, but they can bleed for a longer time. Their blood does not have enough of a particular *clotting factor.* Clotting factor is a protein in blood that controls bleeding.
- Hemophilia is quite rare. About 1 in 10,000 people are born with it.
- The most common type of hemophilia is called *hemophilia A*. This means the person does not have enough clotting factor VIII (8). A less common type is called *hemophilia B*. This person does not have enough clotting factor IX (9). The result is the same for hemophilia A and B; that is, they bleed for a longer time than normal.

How do people get hemophilia?

- People are born with hemophilia. They **cannot** catch it from someone, like a cold.
- Hemophilia is usually inherited, meaning that it is passed on through a parent's *genes.* Genes carry messages about the way the body's cells will develop as a baby grows into an adult. They determine a person's hair and eye colour, for example.
- Sometimes hemophilia can occur when there is no family history of it. This is called *sporadic* hemophilia. About 30% of people with hemophilia did not get it through their parent's genes. It was caused by a change in the person's own genes.

How is hemophilia inherited?

- When the father has hemophilia but the mother does not, none of the sons will have hemophilia. All of the daughters will carry the hemophilia gene.
- Women who have the hemophilia gene are called *carriers*. They sometimes show signs of hemophilia, and they can pass it on to their children. For each child, there is a 50% chance that a son will have hemophilia and a 50% chance that a daughter will carry the gene.

What are the signs of hemophilia?

The signs of hemophilia A and B are the same.

- Big bruises;
- Bleeding into muscles and joints, especially the knees, elbows, and ankles;
- *Spontaneous* bleeding (sudden bleeding inside the body for no clear reason);
- Bleeding for a long time after getting a cut, removing a tooth, or having surgery; and
- Bleeding for a long time after an accident, especially after an injury to the head.

How is hemophilia treated?

- Treatment for hemophilia today is very effective. The missing clotting factor is injected into the bloodstream using a needle. Bleeding stops when enough clotting factor reaches the spot that is bleeding.
- **Treat bleeding quickly!**
  Quick treatment will help reduce pain and damage to the joints, muscles, and organs. If bleeding is treated quickly, less blood product is needed to stop the bleeding.
- **If in doubt, treat!**
  If you think you have a bleed, get treatment even if you are not sure. NEVER wait until a joint is hot, swollen, and painful. Do not worry that you may "waste" a few treatments.
- There is no cure yet, but with treatment people with hemophilia can live normal healthy lives. Without proper care, many people with hemophilia will die young, or if they survive, they are at great risk of growing up with severe disabilities in their joints.

For more materials, visit www.wfh.org.