

Due to inadequate knowledge about foods and superstition, children are not given supplementary foods at the right time that results in digestive disturbances and diarrhoea. This is mistaken by the uninformed parents as due to the teething of the child. In this context, Mr. Reddy from Muscat explains the importance of proteins in our diet.

Proteins—their importance in nutrition

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The strength of a nation depends on the quality of its kitchens. This connotes how important is the quality of food that we take in our daily life. In this context, the Protein contents of food determine the quality of our food. No doubt carbohydrates, fats, vitamins, and minerals are also necessary for maintenance of our body.

Proteins, as we know, are nitrogenous substances. Proteins also contain carbon, hydrogen, oxygen and phosphorous. But the nitrogen balance of our body is responsible for normal growth and development. Proteins, when taken, are digested and absorbed into our blood as amino-acids. Among these, essential amino-acids must be taken in our diet, which cannot be produced or synthesised in our body like other amino-acids.

Hence proteins, as a whole, are necessary for our body for (1) Synthesis of cell protoplasm (2) For the repair of wear and tear of the body (3) For storage of proteins and utilisation of proteins (4) Synthesis of bile-acids (5) Synthesis of hormones (6) Synthesis of enzymes (7) Synthesis of milk proteins in lactating mothers (8) Synthesis of plasma proteins (9) Synthesis of antibodies which protect us from diseases (10) Synthesis of Rhodopsin which is necessary for normal vision in dim light (11) For maintenance of acid and alkaline balance

of blood (12) For giving energy while on work (13) For production of melanin which is responsible for normal colour of the skin (14) For production of sex hormones.

Deficiency of proteins in daily diet results in the following conditions.

In children who are breast-fed, even after one year of age, the Protein contents of breast milk are inadequate with their growing needs. It is necessary to gradually wean the child by adding supplementary foods, like cereal preparations, skimmed milk powder, boiled eggs and fruits in desired quantities. Children should be given ordinary milk with other diets from the age of six months and breast milk should be stopped by the end of one year. But due to inadequate knowledge about foods and superstition, children are not given supplementary foods at the right time. This results in digestive disturbances leading to chronic Diarrhoea which depletes the child of whatever proteins he has. This is mistaken by the parents as due to the teething of the child. The fact is that the child is not adequately fed leading to losses of quantities of protein that results in diseases like Marasmus and Kwashiorkor.

Calcium and iron are also not properly bound in blood due to lack of protein. This low calcium

level produces bow-legs, pigeon chest, rickets and hypoproteinemia. Thus the child loses resistance and becomes susceptible to chronic diseases like Tuberculosis, Anaemia and Diarrhoea.

To avoid protein malnutrition, an individual with moderate work should take about 50 to 60 Gms. of protein per day. Children from six months to six years of age require about 3 gms. of protein per kg. bodyweight per day. Pregnant women and lactating mothers require about 80 gms. of protein per day.

An individual may afford to have the food as to the required quantities of protein but often fails to take it due to illiteracy, food fadism and lack of interest. Sufficient quantities of protein is available from milk, pulses, nuts, cereals, skimmed milk powder and cereal preparations. An addition of two table spoonfuls of milk powder and cereal powder to the normal diet of a child upto the age of one year will provide adequate protein.

The child is the father of man. The man, the family, the community and as a whole the nation will be strong when adequate protein is taken in the daily food. The nutritional survey of common eating places like hotels and hostels will provide an index about nutritional status of a country and its people.