

# Nutrition for Nurses

## Nutrition and Human Welfare

by

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Food, clothing and shelter are the basic necessities of mankind. For nearly all of us, food is the largest item in the cost of living and usually the most potent single factor in the influence of daily habits. Of all the environmental factors, food is most important in affecting the physical, mental and social development of a child. It matters so much in the enjoyment of life and the comfort of living for both the healthy and the sick. Food lays the foundation for sound health. Sir Robert McCarrison, who had worked for many years as a pioneer in nutrition research once said, "the greatest single cause of good health is good food and we eat not only to live but to live well." Today, we conceive of health as not merely freedom from disease, but as a positive buoyant and abundant quality of life.

Good food is basic to health and health is one of the fundamental rights of every human being without distinction of race, religion, political belief, economic status or social condition. Good nutrition has been defined as that condition which permits the development and maintenance of the highest state of fitness, and fitness means positive health, capacity for work, abilities in mental and physical tasks and power to withstand physical, physiological and psychological stresses.

By contributing towards the building of abundant health, food conditions our happiness. A well-fed individual has less inclination for grumbling and fussing over small matters. That nutrition helps in enhancing intellectual performances has been revealed by experiments with school children. Children with good food are more alert and eager to learn their lessons.

Improved nutrition increases the

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individual's welfare and thus raises the total health of the nation. Improved health alters the economic and political power of nations now impoverished and half starved. Starvation in any degree, anywhere, is an important deterrant to world peace. Ill-fed people cannot make good citizens. Hence in planning for human welfare, food must be treated not as a trade commodity but as the first and most important requirement for the fuller life of the new world order.

The National Planning Commission in India have recognized that adequate food

and nutrition are essential requirements for the attainment of community welfare and national health. There must be adequate food for all the people—adequate in terms of both quantity and quality. But, the world today, suffers from a shortage of food, although a few fortunate countries produce more than their requirements. In India, according to Sir John Boyd Orr (former Director General of FAO) there is enough food for only two months out of every three. Dr. V. N. Patwardhan (Director of Nutrition Research Laboratories, Coonoor) has remarked in a review of the Nutritional diseases in India, "India harbours a vertiable museum of nutritional diseases of all kinds of varieties". Malnutrition, arising out of deficiency of food and knowledge, is the cause for many diseases in India.

Much of the evil consequences of malnutrition can be overcome if the existing diets were planned properly. In order to plan diets it is very important to understand the fundamentals of dietetic principles, and also the nutritional processes going on in the human body. An efficient motor mechanic must know the principles of the internal combustion engine, and a competent aircraft pilot should know the principles of flight. It is equally necessary for a person dealing with food, to understand the functions of food upon which health is based.

The human body is often compared to an engine. Given all the necessary materials, the body is different from, and better than the engine. The human body is a complex, living and growing engine. Its different parts act and react upon each other in mutual adjustment, which cannot take place in a machine. The human body is more efficient in the utilization of fuel than an engine and it has the remarkable ability to repair itself while it is on the run and is capable of increasing or decreasing itself after it is made. Furthermore, the engine is practically unaffected by its environment, whereas the human body is played upon by many different stimuli from without and by many thoughts and emotions from within. In the inanimate engine, heat is the primary force for its work, but in the dynamic

human body heat is the outcome of work.

There is plenty of evidence to show that faulty diets decrease vitality vigour, longevity, resistance to infections and are primary or predisposing causes of some diseases, mental depressions and even abnormal psychological states. The application of the principles of dietetics to the raising of health standards and prevention of diseases and promotion of psychological well being is more important to human welfare than the cure of deficiency diseases already developed. Diet is an important factor in determining the position of a race in the scale of mankind. Robert McCarrison in his surveys found a big difference between the people of the North India and those in Madras in their physique. The North Indians were tall, broad shouldered and stalwart. The diet was mixed and balanced. The South Indians were in general short and poorly developed. Their diet was short of many important nutrients.

Since good food is essential for making healthy bodies, for keeping the bodies health and also for healing them, a NURSE should know what is good food for her and for the patient she cares for and why. Nutrition and Dietetics therefore have a significant place in a Nurse's life. Proper food keeps her body and mind healthy and buoyant. She then understands and interprets their meaning for the patients and thus spreads nutrition education while helping them to recover. She should know what constitutes an adequate diet for health ; what are the defects in our present diets ; how these deficiencies affect our health, happiness and mental performances and what she could do towards increasing the nutritional level of the people she meets.

The science of nutrition has taught us that nature can assist nature in shaping our destinies. It offers to those who will come under its influence, greater vigour and a higher level of cultural attainment. The newer knowledge of nutrition reveals to us that our daily choice of food influences that "Informal Environment" of the body which directly conditions and contracts the life processes.

*(To be Contd.)*