

MEDICAL DIETETICS

The Chemistry of Life

Man as we observe him in his widely varied phases and functions, is the product of a complex chemical process of nutrition. Human nutrition results in human life as it is lived. It is perhaps true that no single influence is more determining upon life in all its bearings, qualities, endurance and end results, than the chemistry of nutrition.

During prenatal formation we are made of what our mothers ate. After birth our life, physical, mental and spiritual is maintained upon what we eat.

A well balanced, efficient, fullness of life, demands for its realization, the operation of a normal chemistry of nutrition. It is a wonderful process that transforms crude food materials, first into that liquid fluid of life, the blood, and then uses this blood to build up and maintain in structure and function all of the varied organic processes; even our thought life is maintained with energy derived from the food we eat.

This nutritional process requires some forty-five to fifty chemical substances found in earth and air. The vegetable chemistry builds these elements into compounds suitable for human nutrition, such as proteins, starches, sugars, fats, mineral salts and vitamins.

Man's responsibility consists in selecting for his daily nutriment an assortment of food-stuffs, which together provide the several essential substances to maintain the vital chemistry. These selections, if wisely done, will contribute greatly to his success. Otherwise, defective nutrition may be the real explanation of failure to make good physically, mentally or morally.

With the development of biological chemistry, a new day has dawned in therapeutics. The time is not far distant when internal medicine will concern itself more with scientific control of diet than with pharmaceuticals.

The nutritional or therapeutic value of a particular food, or class of foods, is not determined by its chemical composition alone, it is also necessary to consider the reactions induced by its introduction.

Lactic acid containing foods retard oxidation whereas malic acid foods encourage that process. Putrefaction colon bacilli are encouraged by certain foods and discouraged by others. Red and white blood cell formation is augmented or retarded according to inclusion or exclusion of certain known food factors. The endocrine glands are very responsive to food influences.

This brief survey may suffice as an introduction to a more detailed study of nutrition and clinical dietetics which is to follow in succeeding numbers of the 'Nursing Journal.'

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When the finger nails grow quickly it is a sure sign of good health.

About a third of those who lose their reason recover.