

THE NURSING JOURNAL OF INDIA

PUBLISHED BY
THE TRAINED NURSES' ASSOCIATION OF INDIA.
(REGISTERED UNDER ACT XXI OF 1860.)

Vol. XVIII]

JULY, 1927

[No. 7

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FATIGUE

A Talk to Nurses

By DR. R. H. H. GOHEEN, M.D., VENGURLA.

THERE are few occupations in modern society that ask more of service in hours or more of giving out from the store-house of the heart than does nursing. Beyond the daily routine, moreover, is the not infrequent "emergency" that may tax even the last reserves of energy. It may be the mind that is first exhausted in such a circumstance, leaving the body to function as an automaton. When one call after another has made its relentless demands, pathetic indeed become the worn out face and figure. A nervous break-down may result.

Having drawn first the rather dark background of this fairly familiar picture, it is now desirable to examine the causes and to go into the measures that will help to prevent and combat them.

Fatigue is the subject then on which we must concentrate. What is it; what its effects, and how can it be controlled? Physiologically we find that continued muscular action, by the oxidation of carbohydrates and

fats, liberates products into the blood that, until they are excreted by the kidneys and the lungs, act as poisons to the vital organs. It is these poisons, and not the supposition that the energy supply (the fuel for the engine) must be used up, that account for the tired feeling that results. The average healthy body has a wonderful reserve of fuel we know, as demonstrated by those who have fasted for days and weeks even without abandoning much of their usual work. Similar to the effects of muscular action are those of cerebration. In fact the quiet action of the brain cells takes proportionately quite as much out of the blood as does that of muscle cells, and results, likewise, in waste products that produce fatigue. Important experiments in recent years have shown positively how fatiguing are the emotions—fear, anger, mirth, pity, etc. We all know how exhausting it is to be tickled!

To understand that physiological fatigue is really the result of poisoning in the blood, we have only to remember the frequency of the tired feeling in pathological states. Certain bacterial poisons produce it as an outstanding symptom, for example those of tuberculosis and malaria.

Finally we have the most interesting and valuable testimony of those who are given to fasting that instead of feeling increased fatigue after several days of fasting, on the contrary both the body and the mind become fresh and buoyant. And this is probably because elimination proceeds uninterruptedly from a circulatory system that is unburdened by an overabundance of fresh nutriment. Those who fast must have water, however, and it is the water that aids in the excretion of waste products. One last consideration concerning fasting but an important one: during fasting the alimentary system obtains rest. Its contents are cleared away, including the myriads of bacteria that all too often overstep their province and produce toxins that on being absorbed undermine their host,—particularly if that host has developed the careless habit of constipation. This source of bacterial toxins might have been mentioned above along with those of tuberculosis and malaria.

Now then, confining ourselves again to the consideration of physiological fatigue—not that caused by disease—and having some idea of its cause and effects, let us consider its management. All will agree that *Rest* is the best antidote. There is no other measure so good as immediate, sufficient rest: *because* it allows for excretion of the poisons. Some would add food and this addition would not be erroneous if it be judiciously applied. At this point it may be safer to elaborate. When worn out in the middle or at the end of a hard day's work, a large meal will not be well digested, and an appetite completely appeased will probably result in large food residues that will only feed the bacterial flora of the lower intestine and so augment their toxin production, thus rather injuring than benefiting the tired body. More beneficial than the *large* meal at such a time would be none at all or a good strong purgative instead. But to be conservative let us recommend as a routine, first of all plenty of water or other

bland liquid (not strong tea, coffee or liquors) between meals throughout the fatigue-producing day. This will aid greatly to eliminate the waste products and so will prevent to a great extent the production of fatigue. Water or other liquids are best taken freely several hours after meals, and only at such a time can they be taken freely with supreme benefit by all, whether ill or well. When taken during meals in more than moderate amounts, they do dilute the digestive juices and so render them less efficient. Between meals they act as nature's diuretics and are beneficial. As to meals, then, let us remember that it is not the amount eaten but the amount absorbed that will be beneficial; and that during fatigue all the tissues of the body are tired including the digestive apparatus. The meal should be scanty rather than abundant. It should consist of easily digestible food, simple, well cooked and daintily served. During fatigue the mind is easily upset. Nothing is more upsetting than food poorly cooked or inappropriately served.

With the discussion of rest and diet we need to mention stimulation only to condemn it. The so called tonics all contain poisons of one sort or another, usually alcohol with alkaloids such as strychnine, belladonna, etc. These substances act merely as a whip to a jaded horse. Poisoned with waste-products, as we have seen the tired body to be, additional poison can only do more harm than good. If any drugs are needed at all they should be of a purgative nature, as has been intimated above. Work is itself the most powerful of all stimulants, especially such work as nursing that engages the activities of the mind as well as of the body. The responsibilities of a varied and often delicate technique, accompanied by the stirring of the emotions (and sadly inefficient is the nurse whose heart no longer responds with sympathy and affection), together with prolonged hours of standing, walking and climbing stairs,—here is a programme continuously provided with stimuli. Over-work merely means over stimulation, the body having insufficient time to relax and rest. It is doubtful whether even the indolent and lazy will benefit from nerve-vigours and the thousand and one so called tonics on the market, certainly not the faithful nursing sister!

There are one or two other measures, however, that may prove helpful to some at times or to others many a time. One is deep breathing. Oxygen is a restorer, a real invigorant more useful to the body than any other single element. By four minutes or so of rapid deep breathing a wonderful sense of refreshment steals through the body. I find it best to lie on the back while using this method. One should not go too far or dizziness will occur.

Music is another refreshing agent that is too little used. In this age of gramophones it is accessible to most, and should be to all who are influenced by it,—and there are but few who are not. Beginning with the gentler andantes one can pass on as desired to the stirring marches or dances that seldom fail to stir the feet. More fortunate perhaps are

those who possess and play some instrument instead of or at the close of the above programme.

Lest this thesis defeat its own end by being too long, let us very briefly review in a summary for those who seldom read much.

SUMMARY.

Nursing is an occupation that demands much of both mind and body.

Fatigue is the result of poisoning by the waste products of cellular activity, and all of the body is affected: physiological or natural fatigue results from muscular and cerebral cellular activity; pathological fatigue is a symptom of bacterial poisoning.

Rest of body and mind is the antidote indicated for natural fatigue. The intaking of bland fluids at the proper times and in goodly quantities will assist in the excretion of these poisons. During fatigue fasting is better than eating, and purgation far preferable to a hearty meal; but moderation at the table is a safe middle course.

Increased oxygen intake by deep breathing is an effective restorer.

Music is a splendid refreshing agent.

THE HEALTH VISITOR AND HER WORK

BY EDRIS GRIFFIN.

(A.) How can a greater number of Indian women for training as Health Visitors be obtained?

The problem of obtaining the right kind of women to train as health visitors has been a source of worry to the heads of training schools for some time. Age is the first thing to consider; it is a mistake to have quite young girls as they are inexperienced in the bigger things of life and make no impression on the mothers they wish to teach. If they are elderly they are set in their own ideas and do not take kindly to modern methods and teaching. If training schools do not take young girls, the better educated ones are lost to us as they choose their careers on leaving school or college.

With a view to obtaining students addresses might be given to the girls in the upper classes of High Schools and Colleges, setting out the aims of the Child Welfare movement and the prospects of health visitors after training. A good deal could be explained to the girls about the need for health visitors and the difference it would make in national life if babies could be born healthy and brought up to be strong and capable citizens. They should be given the idea that healthy mothers produce healthy babes and the need for ante-natal care impressed on them. It is not sufficient to just save the lives of infants to allow them to grow up into sickly men and women; such are a burden on the community. The girls could