

Lectures on Elementary Physiology in relation to Medical Nursing.

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LECTURE III.—DIGESTION AND INDIGESTION.

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WHEN patients are unable to take their ordinary amount of exercise it is possible to give them more nourishment than they can digest; or on the other hand it is equally possible to give them some form of nourishment of which, in their weakened condition, they can make no sufficient use. It is therefore a golden rule that in the nursing of sick persons the diet should be of the simplest, and at the same time of the most nourishing quality, so that on the one hand they shall have, with the least possible exertion to their digestive organs, all the nourishment which they require, and on the other that they shall not be overloaded with food which they are unable to digest. For this reason, therefore, MILK is the diet which is pre-eminently useful for sick people, and it is most useful for a Nurse to acquaint herself with the various methods of preparing milk diets. Very often, patients will complain that they are unable to take milk at all: some will even say that it makes them sick. In the latter case, the difficulty is often overcome by the simple expedient of colouring and flavouring the milk with a little coffee. Many patients who cannot take raw milk are able to take it boiled; or again, many can take it mixed with soda water, who could not perhaps take it in the pure form. The importance of careful cooking for the sick cannot be over-estimated, and some of the most successful Private Nurses are those who have rendered themselves adepts in the art of preparing invalid diets. Then, again, in persons convalescing from serious illness, the form in which the diet is served is often of the greatest moment, and some will take nourishment when it is daintily served who would decline it altogether if it were presented to them in a careless, rough, or untidy manner.

Ulceration of the Stomach is one of the most common diseases of that organ which comes under the notice of Nurses. It occurs at all ages, but most commonly between the years of eighteen and twenty-five. It is usually found in the form of one or more shallow depressed

ulcers, with a smooth edge "as though it had been punched out" of the mucous membrane of the stomach, and most commonly on the posterior wall of the organ. It is more common in women than in men, and in persons who have suffered from anæmia or much mental trouble or anxiety. It is also more common in those who suffer from constipation than in others; and as a general rule the health has suffered severely for some time before the symptoms of ulceration show themselves. In about one case in eight, the patient dies, so that the disease is one of considerable importance. As a general rule, the chief symptom is pain in the epigastric region, occurring shortly after food, and followed by vomiting. With the food there is often mixed more or less blood, in consequence of the opening of small or large vessels in the ulcerated surface. Sometimes large quantities of blood alone are vomited, and then the blood, coagulated by the gastric juice, is quite black. This condition is known and described technically as *Hæmatemesis*. In such cases, the flow of blood into the stomach is often very considerable, and consequently there may not only be vomiting, but also the passage of blood, from the bowels. It is, therefore, necessary for the Nurse to observe most carefully and to report the fact when this occurs. It is necessary, as a practical point, to remember in this connection a fact of great importance. In cases of gastric ulceration, Bismuth is very often prescribed by the doctor, and this drug has the effect of turning the fæces black; consequently, if this fact be not remembered, the Nurse may imagine that blood is being passed from the bowels. Iron and other drugs have also, it may be noted, the same effect.

Bismuth given in mucilage in a mixture, has the faculty of being deposited upon, and thus of covering up, a raw surface; and so when given by the mouth in cases of gastric ulcer, the effect of the drug is to cause the formation of such a protective surface upon the ulcer, under which the tissue can heal in a healthy manner.

The rules of Nursing, in these cases, are founded upon the knowledge of the ulcerated surface in the stomach. If one has a sore place on one's finger, everyone knows that it will not heal unless it be kept at rest and quite clean. If dirt, for example, gets into the wound, or if the wound be constantly pulled open, it can never close up.

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