

Notes on Practical Nursing.

THE DIETING OF PATIENTS. LECTURES TO PROBATIONERS.

By Miss HELEN TODD,

Matron, National Sanatorium, Bournemouth.

VI.—SUITABLE FOOD FOR CONVALESCENTS. —MEATS.

At the close of our last lecture we left our convalescent patient sufficiently advanced to be able to eat white fish of various kinds and simple (fruitless) puddings. We must now consider with what form of meat it will be advisable to allow him to try his powers of digestion.

Speaking generally, meat may be classed for our present purpose according to the length and hardness of its fibres, the closeness of the bundles, and the amount of fat intermixed, for as these characteristics become more marked so may we reckon inversely the power of the human digestive organs to assimilate meat composed of muscle fibre.

As you all know very well, the breast of a chicken is the first meat usually allowed a convalescent patient. This is on account of the absence of fat in this particular part of the bird and also because of the comparative shortness and softness of its muscle fibre, this being rendered again more delicate by steaming or boiling the fowl rather than by roasting it. Of course you can readily understand that, as the bird increases in age so does its flesh lose these properties, and no amount of boiling can restore them. Cocks grow tough sooner than hens, and at a year old are useless for food. In choosing poultry for your invalid, remember that young birds of small-boned and short-legged varieties are the most tender and of the best flavour.

The list of soft and short-fibred meats includes the breast of turkeys, pheasants, partridges, grouse, and pigeons. Avoid the sinewy and muscular legs, as by no means so digestible.

Young hares and rabbits are also useful; of these the back is the most tender part. No game of any description is permissible if it be at all "high," *i.e.*, showing signs of the commencement of decomposition. It should only just be kept long enough for *rigor mortis* to have passed off. This rule holds good in the case of all animal food.

We must forbid the flesh of duck, geese, snipe, and woodcock, on account of the fat mixed with their muscle, which gives their meat its rich greasy qualities.

Coming now to "butchers' meat," we must remember that animals grown to maturity are better than young ones of the same species (a striking contrast to birds and ground game), but that old age or hard work renders muscle hard, tough, and unpalatable.

Mutton from a not too fat sheep, about four years old (preferably from the Mountain, Southdown, or Blackfaced variety), is the best form of butcher's meat for our invalid, and for the first meal or two it should be boiled rather than roast. When choosing your joint bear in mind the more exercise a muscle undergoes the tougher it will become; therefore the legs, shoulders, and neck are much tougher than the back of the same animal, the most tender part of the sheep being its loin and of a bullock its sirloin.

Small-boned animals are, as a rule, more tender than the larger varieties; in fact, as a rough rule we may say the larger the animal the coarser will be the meat. If the animal has been killed whilst in good condition its flesh will be firmly connected with the bone; the muscle will be of a rich darkish red colour slightly mottled with fat; it will be firm and elastic rather than flabby, and should not exude any moisture.

The fibres of beef are harder and longer than those of mutton, and it is never in England eaten boiled unless first salted, which makes it unsuitable for the sick. The most tender portions are the undercut or middle of a sirloin, and later a properly-grilled steak.

The meat should be from a bullock about seven years old and not of a coarse texture. Avoid Christmas beef and all veal.

We do not give pork to anyone with a feeble digestion for various reasons. In the first place, the large amount of fat intermixed with the tissues, makes it indigestible, and, again, it is sometimes dangerous as being the host of several parasites highly injurious to man. To ensure safety it is necessary to raise the temperature of the joint during cooking that it becomes "overdone," and the albumen, too thoroughly coagulated for their ready digestion.

The same danger does not lie hidden in the meat when properly cured; the manner also of cooking hams and bacon renders them both safer and more digestible than fresh pork.

The tongues and brains of animals are not tolerated by a delicate stomach on account of the fat which they contain; tripe is sometimes rejected for the same reason, but generally it is relished and easily assimilated if subjected to long cooking. The hardness and closeness of the fibres of liver and kidneys renders them very indigestible, and therefore quite unsuitable for the sick. Sweetbreads, on the other hand, are most digestible, and can generally be taken as soon as poultry by the patient; they consist of the thymus and pancreatic glands of the calf, the former being the better of the two. Lambs' and sheep's sweetbreads are also to be procured, but they do not form such a delicate dish as do those from the calf.

All internal organs must be cooked whilst quite fresh, as they rapidly begin to decompose.

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)