

The stools of an infant should also be carefully noticed. The first stools are always of a greenish black colour, and are known as the meconium. The colour is due to the presence of the bile of the foetus which collects in the intestinal canal. After the first few days the stools should be light brown in colour, and one or two in twenty-four hours. Should an aperient be necessary, the mildest form of giving one is by administering one to the mother, when it will act upon the child through the milk. A teaspoonful of castor oil may be given, but it has the usual effect of castor oil in producing subsequent constipation. If the stools become green, as sometimes is the case, a grey powder (one grain) for a few days will generally put matters right. A very satisfactory way of securing an action of the bowels is by giving a suppository, made of good yellow soap. This almost invariably produces the required result, and no subsequent constipation ensues.

A valuable indication of the condition of an infant's health and one which should always be noted, is the condition of the fontanelles, especially the anterior one. These are spaces which are covered with membrane, between the frontal and occipital and parietal bones forming the child's head. These spaces are obliterated in the head of an adult, the bones becoming joined together, and forming a solid mass. If the skull were solid, however, in the infant, there would be no room for the development of the brain, and hence this provision of nature. If the child is in good health, the fontanelles will be found to be firm and tense. If they are flabby it is a sign that the condition of the child is unsatisfactory and needs attention.

Another condition which sometimes occurs in the newly-born infant is that of cephal-hæmatoma. This is caused by an effusion of blood below the pericranium. It usually occurs over one or other parietal bone, or possibly both, but the cephal-hæmatoma never passes over a suture, and if one occurs on both parietal bones, the swellings are distinct.

The newly-born infant has occasionally some swelling of the breasts. These may become tense, and painful. They usually yield to the simple treatment of hot bathing, and being kept warm with absorbent wool. If anything further is required the matter should be referred to a medical practitioner.

FOOD.

The best food for an infant is that provided by nature, and the provisions of nature are indications of what is needed by the child. Practically for the first twenty-four hours of its existence an infant needs very little. In district work it will be found necessary continually to give directions as to what a child is not to have, and even then, these directions will be frequently disregarded. It is popularly supposed that within the first few hours of its existence a baby should be made to swallow a bolus composed of butter and sugar. This is supposed to act as an aperient. It is also considered the correct thing to administer to it as much of the gruel prepared for the mother as it can be induced to take, this being frequently lumpy, and the oatmeal of which it is made, very imperfectly cooked. After this preliminary treatment the baby may for the first few months of its life be permitted to live chiefly upon milk, after which it is supposed to thrive best upon a "little of what we have ourselves," this diet including tea, potatoes, and red herrings. Little wonder that infant mortality reaches such appalling proportions.

If the mother is for any reason unable to feed the child it must be fed exclusively on milk diet for the first nine months of its existence. Cow's milk will require diluting in the following proportions:—For the first three months, one-third milk and two-thirds water; the second three months, half milk and half water; the third three months, two-thirds milk and one-third water, after which the child may gradually get on to farinaceous food, and a little good gravy. The milk supplied by the Aylesbury Dairy Company, of St. Petersburg Place, W., or by Messrs. Welford, of Elgin Avenue, Maida Vale, is admirable for feeding infants, as the quality and purity can always be depended upon. One other point must be noted with regard to the feeding of infants, and that is the habit in which the poorer classes often indulge of permitting a child to take the breast long after the time when it should be weaned. The reason for this is partly no doubt the prevalent superstition that so long as the mother is suckling her child she will not become pregnant, but this is absolutely without foundation, and the practice is one which is undoubtedly harmful to both mother and child.

(To be continued.)

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)