

**The Nursing of Heart Diseases.**

BY BEDFORD FENWICK, M.D.

Late Senior Assistant Physician to the City of London  
Hospital for Diseases of the Chest.

## CHAPTER IV.

*(Continued from page 3.)*

So far as the nursing of cases of Aortic Aneurism is concerned, it may be said that this consists of little beyond that which is requisite in any medical case—with the exception perhaps of two points. First, the extreme necessity of keeping the patient at absolute rest; and secondly, the need of care in his dietary.

Sufficient has already been said as to the progress of these cases to show that the only chance of cure must consist in so restraining the power of the heart's action as to prevent any undue force being exerted by the circulation upon the dilated blood vessel. But it is not sufficient, in order to secure this, merely to keep the patient in bed, nor even to afford him the assistance which ordinary nursing gives. It is essential that he should be prevented from making any exertion whatever, which would in the slightest degree increase the action of the heart. In general terms, therefore, he cannot be allowed to do anything for himself.

With reference to his dietary, there are two great principles to be observed. In nearly every case, the doctor will restrict as far as possible the amount of liquids which the patient may take, and thus the diet is made as nearly dry as possible.

The reason for this will be obvious to those who have carefully followed these lectures. The medical treatment is designed to effect a clotting of the fibrin of the blood in the dilatation of the blood-vessel. In order to do this, the quantity and consistency of the blood become, of course, points of the utmost importance. The former, in fact, must be diminished as much as possible; and the latter increased. The less blood circulating through the affected artery—that is to say, the less fluid that blood is—the quieter will be the flow on the one hand, while, on the other, the greater will be the possibility of coagulation taking place.

It has been frequently shown that the fluidity of the blood depends upon the amount of fluid taken into the body; and therefore it is obvious that, in these cases, the amount of liquids must be most carefully restricted, if the fluidity of the blood is to be usefully controlled. All that has

been said, therefore, upon this matter in previous lectures, and especially in those relating to the treatment of dropsy, may be usefully remembered in the nursing of these cases of aneurism.

The patient's thirst can be minimised, and his food made as palatable as possible, by means of expedients which have been already described; and he must be persuaded as to the need of bearing what discomfort there is involved in this dietary, by the tact of the nurse, and the assurance that it is an essential element in the successful treatment of his complaint.

Closely connected with this matter, there is another, the importance of which need hardly be emphasized. Patients suffering from aneurism are almost invariably forbidden to take stimulants of any kind, for the simple reason that their effect is to excite and increase the action of the heart, which it is the whole object of medical treatment to quieten and restrain. But, in some cases, the difficulty of carrying out this restriction is very great. Many patients who suffer from aneurism have been in the habit all their lives of taking more or less stimulants; and, especially amongst patients in the upper classes, the deprivation of wine from the dietary may cause not only a want of appetite but also an actual distaste for ordinary food. Some will even go so far as to assert that they cannot digest their food without their accustomed stimulant, and these are most difficult cases to nurse. If the patient does not eat, his bodily strength, upon which so much depends, and the proper constitution of his blood, upon which everything depends, so far as a cure is concerned, may be very materially affected. Yet, on the other hand, two or three glasses of wine may sufficiently excite the heart to undo, to a considerable extent, the good which a week's rest and quiet has effected.

A practical way, however, of obviating this difficulty, which in some cases is effectual, is to administer to the patient a dose of tonic bitters before each meal. This stimulates the secretions of the stomach just as alcohol does; and thus the patient may obtain the benefits of his accustomed stimulant, without the detrimental effects of the latter upon the heart's action being also produced.

For the same reason, the addition of sauces to the food is often a valuable means of aiding the digestion or stimulating the jaded appetite.

*(To be continued.)*

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)