

relieve the bowels, therefore patients with heart disease should have the bowels kept loose. There is another reason for keeping the bowels loose, that is to drain off water from the blood in this way, and so relieve the heart and kidneys. The amount of blood in the body should be lessened by giving the patient a moderately dry diet, and so reducing the amount of blood to be driven through the body, and hence the work of the heart. The general nutrition of the body should be kept up by nutritious food, and care should be exercised that this be of the most digestible kind, as fermentation of food in the stomach distends that organ, and embarrasses the heart by its pressure, and is one of the most frequent causes of palpitation, etc., in persons who have no organic disease of the heart at all; much more, therefore, is it likely to trouble a heart already diseased.

In heart disease certain drugs are often prescribed, and though the nurse has nothing to do with prescribing them, she should know something about what they are expected to do and various precautions that might be used.

Digitalis, or foxglove, is one of those most often used; its action is to strengthen the heart beat and diminish its frequency, and to contract the small arteries. In doing this it raises the pressure of blood in the arteries and increases the flow of urine, and so is specially useful where there is dropsy with a diminished output of urine and a very frequent, perhaps irregular, pulse.

A very good record of the work of the heart is the amount and specific gravity of the urine, and this should be collected and examined each day, an increase in its amount and a diminution of specific gravity being signs of improvement of the heart's action. If digitalis be given in large doses, or for too long a time, it may cause vomiting, and the heart's action and pulse may again become irregular or intermittent.

Strychnine is another drug of use in failure of the heart, it stimulates the heart through the nervous system, and raises the blood-pressure by this, and by a contraction of the small arteries, and so improves the circulation.

Stimulants such as camphor, musk, and alcohol may be very useful in heart disease, but of course must only be given under medical orders.

For the relief of dropsy in heart disease it is sometimes useful to raise the head of the

bed or cot by placing blocks six or nine inches high under the two legs at the head, in this way the fluid tends to gravitate downwards towards the patient's lower extremities, and so easy breathing may be facilitated. If the dropsy have gravitated downwards to the lower extremities by this posterial treatment, and be not readily absorbed by the circulation, it may be necessary to remove it through the skin.

This may be accomplished by Southey's tubes, which consist of a fine trochar and cannula, to the latter of which a fine indiarubber tube is attached. The instrument is inserted under the skin of the lower part of the leg, the trochar removed, so that the fluid may flow through the cannula and rubber tube into a basin placed beneath the bed for its reception. Several of these tubes may, if necessary, be used for each leg, and the drainage of fluid hastened. In this form of treatment the nurse must use the greatest care to avoid contamination of the wounds. Before the tubes are inserted the legs must be thoroughly washed with soap and hot water, and the skin rubbed with carbolic lotion or perchloride solution. The instruments must be clean and thoroughly boiled and put to soak in carbolic lotion (1 in 20), and after their insertion the legs must be wrapped in antiseptic gauze, or otherwise thoroughly protected. After removal of the cannulae the wounds must be attended to till they heal, as an unhealthy dropsical tissue is more easily excited to inflammation than healthy tissue, and owing to incomplete precautions the skin may slough, or a spreading erysipelatous inflammation arise. Some doctors prefer to make larger incisions over the ankle to remove the dropsy and dispense with the use of Southey's tubes.

Heart diseases cause death in two ways, either slowly by stagnation of blood in the veins producing congestion of the lungs, dyspnoea, dropsy, etc., with much lividity of the face and extremities, or suddenly by syncope or fainting. When fainting occurs in a case of heart disease it is necessary to give stimulants, cold water may be poured over the head and face, which should be kept on a level with the body, and artificial respiration may be tried, but the chance of its doing good is very slight. In such cases as these the child may die in a few minutes from the failure of the heart.

(To be continued.)

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)