

The Nursing of Children's Diseases.

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LECTURE I.

THE FEEDING OF INFANTS.

The very best food for the child is, of course, the mother's breast. Unfortunately at the present day, it would seem that mothers are less able to nurse their infants than was formerly the case. The milk is either insufficient in quality or in quantity to nourish the child. Disease in the mother, such as phthisis, of course makes it desirable that the child should not be nourished at the breast, and this is also the case if the mother again becomes pregnant.

A common mistake is too frequent nursing. The rule from the first month should be every two hours between 6 a.m. and 10 p.m. and once during the night, and the child should not be kept at the breast for longer than a quarter of an hour at a time. There are two reasons for regularity in feeding. Too frequent nursing causes the infant's stomach to be overworked; and the milk being too frequently drawn becomes unequal in composition, being too watery after a long interval and too concentrated and rich after a short one.

It should be remembered that various drugs taken by the mother, such as morphia or Epsom salts, are excreted in the milk and so may affect the infant. Any violent emotion alters the composition of the milk, and so again the infant may suffer. The mother's diet should consist largely of milk, light puddings, fish, and potatoes, etc., and beef, mutton, and fruits should be taken in moderation; highly seasoned foods, pastry, and uncooked fruit should be avoided, and alcoholic liquids are unnecessary.

Many cases of infantile indigestion are due to the constipating effect of the mother's milk, which is often due to a deficiency of fatty constituents. In this case, an increase of proteids in the mother's diet is indicated, as this leads to an increase of fat in the milk. Other cases of indigestion are due to an increase of albumen in the milk. This may be merely relative, that is to say, due to a deficiency of water, in which case the mother should be instructed to drink more fluid. Or there may be an absolute increase in

the amount of albumen; due to insufficient exercise or fresh air. In some cases, the quantity of milk may be insufficient; this may sometimes be corrected by more generous diet, and ordinary hygienic measures to improve the general nutrition of the body. But, in many cases, the mother's milk must be supplemented by an artificial food, the methods of preparing which will be considered later.

WEANING.

The length of time an infant takes its sole nourishment from the mother's breast depends upon many conditions. When the mother is strong and healthy, the child may be nourished in this way till it is nine months old. "Forty weeks in the womb, forty weeks at the breast" was the old fashioned aphorism. Among the working classes, however, this period is often extended, even to dangerous lengths. An overnourished child may be fat, but it is flabby, and its tissues have not the elasticity of health. It is weakly, and apt to be ricketty and liable to gastro-intestinal and lung derangements. The mother's milk, at the end of a long period of nursing, is apt to be deficient in fat and proteid, of low specific gravity, and, consequently, not sufficiently nutritious for the child, whose rapid growth and increasing weight demands more nourishment. At any period of lactation it may be necessary to either supplement the mother's milk or to stop nursing altogether. This may be on account of depression in the health of the mother, or for the sake of the infant. Much information on the health of the child may be gained by weighing it every week. For the first three or four months it should gain five or six ounces a week, and from the third to the sixth month a gain of three or four ounces a week is normal, and indicates that it is thriving. This increase of weight should be accompanied by an increase in its liveliness, and its tissues should become firm. The author recently saw a child whose weight at a year old was nearly three stone, an excessive amount which was due to flabby fat and was consequently not an indication of health. In this case the mother's milk, on analysis, was found to contain an excess of sugar of milk, and to this cause the obesity of the infant was clearly to be assigned.

The following table represents the average gain of a healthy child nourished on the breast at first, and later, on cow's milk.

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