

Notes on Practical Nursing.

THE DIETING OF PATIENTS.

LECTURES TO PROBATIONERS.

By MISS HELEN TODD,

Matron, National Sanatorium, Bournemouth.

I. CLASSIFICATION OF FOOD-STUFFS.

The dieting of patients is the duty of the physician, and under no circumstances must the nurse ever appear to question his treatment in this respect. It will, however, devolve upon her to carry out the instructions, and, in order to do this intelligently, she must know something of the principles of dietary and digestion, and why, in certain cases, particular articles of food are forbidden which may be essential for the patient's well-being under other conditions.

In a hospital ward exceedingly minute directions are always given as regards the feeding of patients; there is generally a diet table for guidance, which allows of variety only between certain narrow and well-defined limits; if any question should arise as to the desirability or otherwise of a certain article of food, the nurse has no responsibility in the matter; she can always refer to the Sister of the ward, who, if in doubt, can in turn consult the physician.

In private or district work, on the other hand, the treatment of a certain case may be, as in the hospital, largely by diet. The doctor may have contented himself with simply laying down general rules as to the class of food necessary, trusting to the nurse's knowledge for the proper carrying out of his instructions in detail. The patient may fancy, or a friend may send, some delicacy which the physician does not happen to have either sanctioned or forbidden, and if his visits are not of daily occurrence there may not be an opportunity of consulting him in the matter. Under these circumstances the nurse must decide, and it is therefore well that she should possess some ground upon which to base her judgment.

In the first place she should know something of the digestive and excretory organs and their various functions in order that she may realise how the withholding of certain foods can affect the human economy.

She should also clearly understand the classification of food-stuffs in order that she may carry out the dietetic treatment prescribed under certain conditions caused by the patient's inability to digest, assimilate, or use up certain elements (such as nitrogen or sugar), the intake of which must be regulated so that the excretory organ may not suffer from overwork or break down in its efforts to get rid of the surplus material.

The nurse must, finally, learn how the digestibility of some foods is affected by different methods of preparation and cooking; why, for instance, a boiled fish may be given when the same, if fried, would not be tolerated, and wherein the bread and milk allowed a patient convalescent from enteric fever differs from that made for the children's breakfast.

I. Organic—

(a) Nitrogenous group consisting of proteids, chemically composed of carbon, oxygen, hydrogen, and nitrogen. This group is sub-divided into two classes, the globulins and albumens, the first insoluble in water, the second soluble in water.

(b) Non-nitrogenous group consisting of—1, fats composed of carbon, oxygen, and hydrogen; 2, carbo-hydrates composed of the same chemical elements, but in different proportion. In this group the hydrogen and oxygen are always present in the same ratio as in water (H_2O); 3, organic salts.

II. Inorganic—

(a) Inorganic salts.

(b) Water.

Of these groups the fats and carbo-hydrates are to a very large extent interchangeable, the one taking the place of the other. This is practically demonstrated in the Arctic regions, where oils are largely used, and starchy food almost impossible to procure. The proteid group, on the other hand, is essential for the continuance of animal life. From it alone can the tissues obtain the nitrogen without which they would cease to exist.

It is possible, however, under certain circumstances to cut down the proteids to an exceedingly small quantity; indeed, the great majority of persons habitually consume far more nitrogenous foods than they really require to preserve the body in equilibrium.

The proteid group is chiefly represented in our food by the flesh (lean meat, not fat) of animals, birds, and fishes; the albumen and globulin (in the yolks) of eggs, the casein in milk and cheese, the gluten of flour, and the legumin in peas, beans, lentils, &c.

There are three fairly simple tests by means of which the presence (if any) of proteids, either liquid or solid, can be ascertained in a given substance. We can easily demonstrate these tests by a little white of egg.

I. Boil the specimen with a little nitric acid, the albumen will precipitate and turn yellow; add a little ammonia, and the yellow will become orange.

II. On mixing with Millon's reagent (a preparation of nitrate of mercury) proteids form a white precipitate, which turns red when heated.

III. Mixed with caustic soda and a drop of very dilute copper sulphate solution proteids form a blue precipitate, which, when shaken in the test

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