

Diet in Pregnancy.

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When one considers the many differences in the constitutional condition of a woman, which are caused by pregnancy, and the increasing demands which are thus made for months upon her strength, it becomes obvious that her nutrition during this time of strain and stress must be of the greatest importance to the welfare both of herself and her child. It is, therefore, well that trained nurses should understand the principles upon which their pregnant patients are dieted, so that they can with intelligence carry out the necessary details.

Briefly, the subject may be divided into two parts—the diet for ordinary cases, and that for special conditions of pregnancy. With regard to the former class—which, of course, includes all healthy women with normally-formed pelvises—the chief point to remember is that the special strain of the process comes upon, first, the woman's heart; and, secondly, her digestive system. The heart has to do very severe extra work in maintaining the circulation through the placental and foetal vessels. Consequently there is always a certain amount of hypertrophy present; and with this condition a tendency to congestion of the venous system. Thus the face is more or less flushed, the veins of the pelvis and limbs are swollen and often varicose. This over-fulness of the blood-vessels teaches the common-sense lesson that the patient should be restricted as to liquids in her dietary, and in most cases when they are limited to two pints of fluid a day they will experience and express a marked sensation of comfort. In the next place, whilst on the one hand there is an increased need and desire for nourishment to build up the tissues of the foetus, the increasing distension of the abdomen sets up numberless symptoms of indigestion. The second golden rule, therefore, in these cases is to give food in small quantities and at frequent intervals. The stomach can in fact easily do more work, but it must never be overloaded. Ordinary meals and ordinary mealtimes are both inapplicable. Thirdly, the lighter and simpler the diet is, the more comfortable and well-nourished will the patient be; the more easily, in fact, will digestion be accomplished; and the less will the patient suffer from the miseries of dyspepsia. Fourthly, except in rare instances, all wines and spirits are inadvisable, because

they increase the irritability of an already over-congested nervous system, and of an already over-loaded heart.

It is when we deal with patients who are not healthy, or in whom there is some pelvic deformity, that the full importance and usefulness of a strictly regulated diet is usually impressed upon nurses. In the cases already referred to, a careful diet means comfort; in the latter classes of patients, it means probably the safety of the mother and that of her child.

The question of the diet in different diseases associated with pregnancy is too vast to enter upon here. In every case the doctor would give detailed instructions to the nurse.

But some reference may be made to the diet of patients suffering from deformities of the pelvis which cause difficulty in labour, because this matter is not only one of the highest importance but is also somewhat novel. It may therefore not be without interest to quote the following from a Clinical lecture recently given by the author to medical practitioners:—

“You will all meet with patients to whom a very special diet during pregnancy will be of incalculable advantage. The principle of the system to which I allude is very simple, and is based on well-known physiological facts. You are, perhaps, aware that more than a century ago it was attempted, by means of frequent bleedings, and by a system of semi-starvation of the mother, so to reduce the size of the foetus that it might pass safely and be born alive, even through an extremely contracted pelvis; and, if so, you know that the system failed—as it deserved to fail; that in many instances the starved foetus was born dead, while, in many cases, the mother also failed to survive the treatment to which she was subjected. It was recognised, in fact, that such a remedy was worse than the disease. So much discredit was thrown upon the attempt that it is only within the last few years that more rational and more scientific efforts have been made to influence the growth of the foetus by strictly dieting the mother.

We have not yet, perhaps, arrived at a complete system, but we have, undoubtedly, made sufficient progress to be certain of greatly improved results.

Practically, then, the system to which I allude is based upon the exclusion from the diet, as far as possible, of starchy and saccharine foods, and of the restriction of fluids. In other respects, but little change is made, and nitro-

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