

OUR PRIZE COMPETITION.

WHAT ARE THE CAUSES OF DIGESTIVE DISTURBANCES AMONG INFANTS, AND WHAT STEPS WOULD YOU TAKE IN SUCH CASES?

We have pleasure in awarding the prize this week to Miss M. E. Thorpe, Waldene, Weydon Hill Road, Farnham.

PRIZE PAPER.

Digestive disturbances in infants are recognised by the following symptoms: vomiting, diarrhoea, unnatural stools (green, offensive, or containing curds), excessive flatulence causing pain, colic, and sometimes convulsions.

(a) In breast-fed babies these disturbances may be due to irregular feeding, feeding too quickly, unsuitable food taken by the mother; constipation, illness, or disease of the mother. Also malformation of the baby's stomach—*i.e.*, pyloric stenosis.

(b) In artificially fed babies irregular feeding, and feeding too quickly, may also be the cause, but it is more usually due to unsuitable food. If cow's milk is used, the proteids are much more difficult to digest, the casein being in excess and different in character to that in human milk, and forming a much larger curd in the infant's stomach.

Constipation of the baby may cause trouble, and any malformation of its digestive organs. Also bacteria introduced through the food, and want of cleanliness.

In dealing with these infants one must first endeavour to ascertain the cause of the disturbance. With a breast-fed infant see that the mother is perfectly quiet, and gives it all her attention when feeding. She must not take any violent exercise which will cause her blood to become overheated. If the infant appears to be getting the milk very quickly, it is a good plan to use a nipple shield for the first five minutes. Regular feeding is important: every three hours during the day is usual.

If the mother is inclined to be constipated she should take medicinal paraffin daily. Plain nourishing food must be taken. Highly seasoned foods, acids, and alcohol must be avoided. If in spite of the above precautions the child's digestion is still faulty, it is a good plan to eliminate each article of the mother's diet in rotation and watch the result. If there is still trouble a doctor must be consulted.

Among artificially fed babies digestive troubles are more common. The infant must be fed regularly, and should take at least twenty minutes over his feed. He must be nursed, and the bottle held in position. The

food must be given warm. It is a good plan to put a flannel or woollen cover on the bottle. If there is any sign of constipation, olive oil, medicinal paraffin, or a little fruit juice in warm water should be given daily. If cow's milk is being used for feeding, it must be pasteurised, or boiled *once* when it arrives, and kept in a clean covered vessel.

Also it must be diluted with boiled water and modified to suit the digestive ability of the baby, taking age, weight, and constitution into consideration.

In some cases it may be necessary to peptonise the milk, or to add sodium citrate to each feed.

With premature infants it is well to begin with a mixture of whey and cream, eight parts whey and one cream. Most babies are able to start with one part milk and two of water; lactose, 5viii to Oi of the mixture; and cream, 3ss to each feed. If the latter is not procurable, Virol, or a few drops of cod liver oil or olive oil, may be used. The strength of the mixture may be increased gradually.

Regarding quantity, it is estimated that a baby requires 50 calories for every pound in weight in 24 hours, 20 calories being equal to 3i of milk. Thus a baby of 7 lb. requires 350 calories in 24 hours = 17½ oz. of food. A breast-fed baby seldom overfeeds.

All babies have a certain amount of flatulence after feeding. This is usually easily dispelled by holding them up and gently patting the back. For colic a warm flannel on the abdomen will give relief, or a warm bath.

A doctor must always be consulted concerning any serious or continued digestive disturbance.

HONOURABLE MENTION.

The following competitors receive honourable mention:—Miss Phœbe Goddard, Miss Rachel Dodd, Miss M. James, Miss T. Goode, Miss E. Mann.

Miss Phœbe Goddard writes:—"Few people realise how small a new-born baby's stomach is, being only able at five days to hold one ounce at a time, and therefore, when more is given than it can comfortably hold, vomiting results; and if this does not occur, much pain is caused. *Remedy.*—Give only a certain amount of food at a time, in proportion to the age of the child."

QUESTION FOR NEXT WEEK.

How would you prepare (a) the patient and (b) the room for an emergency operation for appendicitis in a private house? Describe the subsequent nursing.

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