

OUR PRIZE COMPETITION.

STATE SOME REASONS FOR LACK OF SLEEP, AND METHODS OF INDUCING SLEEP.

We have pleasure in awarding the prize this month to Miss Edith L. Rand, St. Leonard's Hospital, Shore-ditch, London, N.1.

PRIZE PAPER.

Sleep is the natural condition of insensibility which normally occurs once during our 24-hour day, during which contraction of the cerebral vessels and beneficial changes in nerve tissue occur which restore the nervous system to its normal tone, no matter what mental fatigue it has been subjected to.

Sleeplessness soon gives rise to intense exhaustion of the brain which would eventually prove fatal.

REASONS FOR LACK OF SLEEP.

The most common cause of insomnia in an adult (in good health) is *worry, disturbing thought*. Worry over a past event, or dread of a pending one, becomes magnified grotesquely while the sufferer is endeavouring to court sleep.

The inevitable psychological factor of "mind over body" dominates his or her being, and sleep will not supervene until a haven emerges from the distorted tangle of threads in the shape of a counter consoling thought, or hypnotic.

Digestive disturbances, caused from insufficient food or a surplus amount, play important parts in deterring sleep. Blood is summoned to the alimentary tract to digest and absorb the meal consumed; this is a helpful factor when the meal is light, e.g., just a cup of hot milk, but a heavy meal, as a late seven-course dinner, causes an over-activity of all organs, and digestion cannot function correctly while the body is recumbent.

The energetic find reason for lack of sleep in *fatigue*; an over-indulgence in exercise taken while body resistance is lowered, causes an excess of Sarco-lactic acid in the muscles which—besides being extremely painful—calls for oxygen, and rest for reconversion. It is not until this takes place, and bodily functions are allowed to resume their own course normally that sleep will take its turn.

Pain, then, takes a further reason for insomnia, incorporation constipation, indigestion or any body disturbance.

For the patient new to an altered position sleep is difficult, and to a convalescent person any discomfort as rucks in the underlying draw sheet, crumbs in the bed, pillows not shaken or arranged comfortably, thirst, too many bedclothes, coverings too heavy, cold feet, draughts, a noise in the ward, dripping taps, etc., or outside disturbances such as loudspeakers so common to-day, an annoying light not properly shaded, will all be irritating properties and delay sleep, that all-essential need for the body in keeping the enemy, disease, at bay.

Any disease, whether painless or painful, will keep Morpheus from his duty, until some means is found to induce him to act.

Tuberculosis of the lung generally considered as painless will irritate the patient to cough incessantly, keeping him awake and only alleviated by drugs.

The temperature of the ward, in winter especially, can be regulated to suit the patient, but if allowed to become "stuffy," the air impregnated with CO₂ and humid, body functions are interfered with and sleeplessness is induced.

METHODS FOR INDUCING SLEEP.

Methods for inducing sleep depend on three factors:—
Muscular relaxation, valuable in all tension of body or mind.

Mental relaxation, which often results from the former, and we fall asleep when thoughts become subdued.

Absence of stimuli, internal or external.

Methods employed take two headings, Natural and Artificial.

Natural. Comfort is the foremost essential for sleep, including freedom from pain, worry, disease, or any of the foregoing reasons for lack of sleep. Darkness, quiet, light warm bedclothes, warmth to the feet if desired, sufficient air to ventilate and avoid draughts, warm baths, light reading, the bed drawn into the open air, if one is used to it, are all useful aids in sleep inducement.

Exercise, to the energetic, taken in moderation is generally a sufficient stimulus to the type who indulge in such.

A cup of hot milk flavoured with Ovaltine at night will assist sleep thus, a supply of blood sent to the stomach and intestines for digestion and absorption of the beverage causes a mild anæmia of the brain and so develops a temporary unconsciousness.

In Disease, warm sponging is useful, especially in excitability, the most hysterical of mental patients will often sleep after a warm sponge. Shading light in soft soothing shades of pink is an art not practised enough to induce sleep. Inability to sleep from severe headaches should be treated by cold compresses of evaporating lotions to the head (Eau de Cologne is excellent), a darkened room, dark coverings to the bed, pillows, draperies, etc., all aid sleep.

Artificial means of inducing sleep. Drugs, such as the Bromides, Chloral, Luminal Paraldehyde are all valuable in their place, but habit formation must always be borne in mind when giving these; natural means must be foremost in treatment of insomnia and drugs only resorted to when other means fail.

Drugs of Hypnotic or Narcotic classification may be administered either by hypodermic injection, by mouth, inhalation as anæsthetic (for operative purposes) per rectum and intravenously.

Sleep should be a normal function in the being with a healthy mind and healthy body, and a healthy mind, in the words of H. Fletcher, will result "if we protect it through each day by refusing to import suspicion, anger, or worry into it: a process that is easier than not, and pleasanter and more profitable than any."

HONOURABLE MENTION.

The following competitors receive honourable mention: Miss Amy Phipps, Longmarton, Ashford, and Miss Kathleen Delaney, Ancoats Hospital, Manchester.

QUESTION FOR NEXT MONTH.

Describe the effects of Tuberculous Disease of the Spine, and complications which may develop during its course. Outline the treatment.

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