

OUR PRIZE COMPETITION.

MENTION SOME OF THE CAUSES OF INSOMNIA. WHAT STEPS MAY BE TAKEN (APART FROM THE ADMINISTRATION OF DRUGS) TO RELIEVE THE CONDITION?

We have pleasure in awarding the Prize this month to Miss Josephine Gilchrist, S.R.N., 48, Melville Street, Edinburgh.

PRIZE PAPER.

Many theories have been advanced about the exact physiology of normal sleep, but the points of agreement which concern the average individual are:—

(a) That sleep is a perfectly natural state recurrent throughout Nature.

(b) Sleep starvation will react prejudicially on our physical and mental well being.

(c) The quality or how *well* we sleep is more important than the quantity or how *long* we sleep.

Insomnia or sleeplessness is inability to sleep adequately for our individual needs.

Three varieties, roughly speaking, are: (1) Inability to fall asleep at the onset, for a variable period.

(2) Frequent awakening with inability to resume sleep for some time.

(3) Waking up at an unduly early hour with no subsequent sleep.

Apart from definite forms of mental and physical disease where insomnia becomes a special significant symptom, as in typhus fever or mental derangement, the causes may be physical, mental, or emotional in origin.

Physical predisposing causes, apart from natural fatigue, may be malnutrition, too frequent micturition, itchiness, and uncomfortable surroundings.

Mental fatigue may be more harmful, due to lack of physical activity, thus affecting the general stimulation of general circulation, anxiety, or nervous apprehension of achievement and responsibility. Emotional fatigue alters glandular activities in the body, and is either induced by individual temperament or by fright or nervous fears. In elderly people, at the present time, the anticipating of air raids and the sound sirens' warning cause a very real emotional disturbance.

Maladjustment to conditions of life or work in common or boredom and lack of interest induces self-pity and makes for a condition worthy of special consideration. Steps may be taken to relieve the condition physically, mentally and emotionally, interacting in benefit being preventive in character to affect a cure.

Environment.—The majority of people have to live and sleep in cities, some have to sleep during the day-time and work during the night, therefore sound and its disturbing noise must be considered. A room not facing the main street, chosen if possible where open windows and ventilation may be had. Light and noise obscured by velour curtains in front of the window; thick rugs on floors; rubber tubing round doorway. Fortunately the police are now taking in hand that modern nuisance of unthoughtful people—the radio loud-speaker. A comfortable single bed is essential. It is true economy to get a mattress suited to one's needs, and bedclothes light in weight, but adequate enough in size to drape over the bed, rather than be tightly tucked in; one-

piece pyjama or loose night wear. Personally cultivate regular habits. *Learn to relax.* Practise first to relax the arms, then legs, trunk, consciously when sitting up and awake; gradually one realises beneficial sleep is induced as relaxation lowers mental, physical and emotional tensions by relaxing muscle groups.

Warm baths and after settled in bed a hot drink, such as Ovaltine, are soothing in effect. In times of mental stress a helpful sedative such as Sedobrol, a bouillon with a small amount of bromide as seasoning may be safely taken; good sleep brought about during a spell of sleeplessness may avert a more serious condition or mental illness, and bring the individual more confidence in overcoming the condition.

Massage is often helpful; suggestion is sometimes beneficial. Some may be influenced by colour schemes, such as blue or green, which are restful. Aromatic scent or perfume act beneficially on suggestive persons by distracting the mind from the condition involved, and stimulating deeper, slower breathing.

Reading a suitable book or magazine often lends itself as a gentle soporific, provided it is not too adventurous or stimulating in character. A reading-lamp clamped to the bed is most useful with a frosted bulb of low calibre—25 watts is quite sufficient. A book of poems or philosophical studies soon make one feel rested and sleepy. The ideal is that one should wake naturally to the happy realisation of another day, but if dependent on an alarm clock, set it ten minutes in advance of the required time so that one may comfortably relax and not suddenly jump to action.

The amount of sleep varies very much with individuals, but at least five to six hours sound unbroken sleep is essential for health.

Many people sleep 8 to 10 hours and wake with that tired feeling, in which case one suspects poor emotional adjustment to life in general.

Briefly considered in order of varieties:—

(1) May be tempered by physical conditions—the cultivation of a quiet mind and avoidance of emotional excitement before bedtime.

(2) May be counteracted by reading for a short time, taking a warm drink from a thermos.

(3) May be controlled by leading a more active life, thus becoming more physically tired—forget self, cultivate interest in hobbies and other people.

QUESTION FOR NEXT MONTH.

Describe Yellow Fever, and how it is propagated and prevented.

THE HEROISM OF BRITISH NURSES.

In London, city of magnificent hospitals, we grieve to learn of damage done to them by bombs and of the suffering of the sick within their walls. The barbarous malignity of the enemy is almost too horrible, to be a human instinct. The silver lining to these tragedies is the magnificent courage of the staff. Our nurses have shown on every occasion of damage to their environment superb British pluck, going about their duties without a tremor. Nothing unusual in this heroism, but we glory in it and are justifiably proud of evidence of the spirit of our nurses which will help to win the war.

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