

MEDICINE

Clay-Eating Illness

GEORGIA WOMEN who crave and actually eat a local clay during pregnancies are twice as likely as most people to get a mysterious illness called sarcoidosis.

The clay-sarcoidosis link was reported at a three-day international conference held at the National Academy of Sciences in Washington, D. C. All sessions were devoted to the mysterious disease which mimics tuberculosis, certain industrial diseases such as beryllium poisoning and certain fungus diseases.

Drs. G. W. Comstock, H. J. Keltz and D. J. Sencer, all of the U. S. Public Health Service, reported, "The type of clay most desired for eating appears to be concentrated in the areas where sarcoidosis is most prevalent.

"In addition, this clay contains appreciable amounts of beryllium."

Sarcoidosis is detected principally by chest X-rays. Its symptoms can be lung trouble, swollen glands or skin rashes. The illness can strike any body organ.

About 75% of the victims recover spontaneously. The remaining 25% develop disability ranging from chronic cough to a crippling of the lungs followed by death.

There is no known cure for sarcoidosis, although cortisone-like drugs have proved helpful in preventing further damage to the eyes, heart and central nervous system of sufferers.

The disease claims 200 lives annually in the United States. It has an incidence here of some four to five persons for each 10,000 of the population. Just how widespread is the disease throughout the nations of the world is unknown. The conferees agreed that the figures for the United States were educated guesses and that sarcoidosis is probably much more common than realized.

Paradoxically, the disease is most commonly found in widely separated geographical areas. In the U. S. it is most commonly found among Negroes. In some areas the rate runs as high as 18 Negroes to one white person. However, the disease is also present in Scandinavia, where there is no Negro population.

Although the cause of sarcoidosis is not known, there are theories to explain its origin. The hypothesis being most widely investigated is the relationship between sensitivity to pine tree pollen and sarcoidosis. It has been shown in the U. S. there is an ecological relationship between regions where the illness is most prevalent and pine forests. Laboratory studies have also shown pine pollen can cause a certain biological reaction similar to that caused by the germ responsible for tuberculosis. In some nations, however, similar studies failed to show such a neat relationship.

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DERMATOLOGY

Soap Gets Under Your Skin

CLEANLINESS may be next to godliness, but soap sometimes causes people trouble, Dr. F. Ray Bettley, physician for diseases of the skin at Middlesex Hospital, London, suggests. He reports studies showing that soap may increase skin permeability and thus allow alkali to reach and irritate cells below the surface of the skin.

Thus, barrier creams that have soap bases should not be used by industrial workers, Dr. Bettley reports in the June 4, 1960, issue of the British Medical Journal. The creams, far from preventing industrial dermatitis, may substantially increase the risk.

Dr. Bettley also reports a series of experiments that indicate less harmful effects to the deep cells of the skin from certain detergents.

He says commercial soaps have generally good antiseptic properties but perhaps more important than this is their ability to wash away the germs on the surface of the hands.

Washing with soap tends to destroy the self-sterilizing power of the skin by lowering its acidity. Dr. Bettley says, but also leaves behind a deposit that may in some degree make up for the loss.

The various effects of washing with soap are antagonistic, he points out, and says that furunculosis, associated with boils, commonly affects the areas of the skin that are washed most frequently. The avoidance

of shaving soap is often sufficient to cure folliculitis, a disease of the hair glands.

However, Dr. Bettley has used a cleanser composed of five percent toilet soap and five percent pure potassium palmitate in the treatment of eczema and other skin diseases. Over a period of one month, patients, nurses and doctors found no irritation except when the cleanser was used in contact with ulcerated surfaces.

"I do not wish to imply that soap plays no part in hand eczemas," he wrote, "but the observations I have mentioned indicate a need for caution in arriving at general conclusions."

In the case of housewives who use soap, he says he has found no proof that irritation results, and "the effect of rubber gloves is often, I think, clearly more harmful still."

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MEDICINE

Rheumatism, Arthritis Helped by New Drug

A DRUG, triamcinolone acetonide (Kenalog), produces better results than hydrocortisone in the treatment of rheumatism and arthritis, Dr. Emil D. W. Hauser of Chicago reports.

Sharp reduction of pain and swelling

and increased ease of movement were noted in all but one of 67 patients. No side effects were seen in spite of frequent dosage.

In the Journal of the American Medical Association, 173:487, 1960, Dr. Hauser says the new drug, injected into the fluid of joint cavities, has a high potency in small dosage.

Eighteen men and 49 women, ranging in age from 19 to 85 years, showing prominent symptoms of swelling, pain and tenderness with limited motion in either a joint or a bursa—cavity filled with fluid—were selected for the study.

Dr. Hauser warns that infection should be guarded against by strict "aseptic techniques."

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