

MEDICINE

Placebos Relieve Pain

PLACEBOS—inactive pills with no power except that of suggestion—are far more effective in giving relief from pain when stress is present than when the pain is induced experimentally. The same is true of certain active drugs; they are more effective in relieving pain when psychological stress is present.

A Harvard Medical School professor, Dr. Henry K. Beecher of the department of anesthesia, Massachusetts General Hospital, Boston, said in the journal *Science*, 132:91, 1960, that “unsuspected ties between mind and body” are revealed in this idea. The principle is:

Certain drugs are effective in relieving internal pain only if the psychological state of the person is anxious or stressful.

Apparently the stronger the psychological state, the more effective the drugs, Dr. Beecher said.

“Similarly, certain common symptoms, pain for example, appear to emerge only if an essential psychological state (anxiety, stress) is present. Physiological derangement (stimulation of pain endings) is not enough.”

Dr. Beecher said that two general concepts grow out of this observation. Not only does the effectiveness of placebos increase with increased stress, but the effectiveness of certain active drugs does also.

Real pain, or pain of pathological origin, produces more anxiety, or stress, than does experimentally contrived pain.

Placebos have long been used by physicians to pacify their patients when no active drug was needed. More recently they have been used as controls in experiments to determine the value of medicinal substances.

Science News Letter, July 23, 1960

child tends to react to this information by character change or symptom formation.”

He advises a thorough investigation of the child and his environment to determine the method and timing of breaking the news to him of his adopted status.

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MEDICINE

Contact Lenses Should Not Be Misused

MISUSE and over-use of contact lenses may cause serious complications, Dr. Richard K. Lansche, U. S. Army Medical Corps captain, told the annual meeting of the American Medical Association, Miami Beach, Fla.

Science News Letter, July 23, 1960

SCIENCE NEWS LETTER

VOL. 78 JULY 23, 1960 NO. 4

Edited by WATSON DAVIS

The Weekly Summary of Current Science, published every Saturday by SCIENCE SERVICE, Inc., 1719 N St., N.W., Washington 6, D. C., NOrth 7-2255. Cable Address: SCIENSERV.

Subscription rates: 1 yr., \$5.50; 2 yrs., \$10.00; 3 yrs., \$14.50; ten or more copies in one package to one address, 7½ cents per copy per week; single copy, 15 cents, more than six months old, 25 cents. No charge for foreign postage.

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Printed in U.S.A. Second class postage paid at Washington, D. C. Established in mimeograph form March 13, 1922. Title registered as trademark, U. S. and Canadian Patent Offices. Indexed in Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature, Abridged Guide, and the Engineering Index. Member Audit Bureau of Circulation.



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BIOCHEMISTRY

Study Role of Histamine

THE ROLE OF HISTAMINE, thought to be associated with allergies, is being investigated in a research program that may lead to a better understanding of this substance as it affects health and disease.

The study is being carried out under the direction of Drs. William J. Hartman and William G. Clark of the University of California Medical School, Los Angeles, and the Sepulveda Veterans Administration Hospital.

Drs. Hartman and Clark and their group recently demonstrated for the first time that histamine is produced normally in human cells by an enzyme. It had previously been thought by many to be produced by intestinal bacteria. The researchers used sterile preparations from basophils, a kind of white blood cell, obtained from patients with acute myelogenous leukemia.

Although histamine is implicated in

allergies, acute infections and inflammation, there is increasing evidence of its roles in normal body functions, the investigators point out. These may include nerve transmission, brain and heart function and production of gastric secretions. Histamine may also be involved in such growth processes as development of the foetus in pregnancy, tissue regeneration and wound healing.

The study is concerned with how the body produces and utilizes histamine in its normal processes. It is also concerned with means of blocking its production in abnormal situations such as allergies and inflammation.

Key to histamine production and a focal point in the study is the enzyme, histidine-decarboxylase, which manufactures the substance.

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PSYCHIATRY

Keep Adoption a Secret

DO NOT TELL a child that he is adopted—at least until he is old enough to have passed through the age of the Oedipal conflicts.

This is the advice to adoptive parents by Dr. Marshall D. Schechter, psychiatrist, of Beverly Hills, Calif., contained in the *Archives of General Psychiatry*, 3:21, 1960.

The Oedipus complex, as described by Freud, is the attachment of a child for the parent of the opposite sex, accompanied by envious and aggressive feelings toward the parent of the same sex. The age of Oedipal conflicts is between the ages of three and six, Dr. Schechter indicates.

The proportion of adopted children who

have to go to a psychiatrist for treatment is much higher than it is for the general population, Dr. Schechter reports.

The fears and fantasies of the adopted child are sometimes aggravated by the well-intentioned ways in which the adoptive parents try to soften the news that the child is adopted:

“We picked you out,” intended to reassure the child, may really serve to suggest to his mind that his own parents did not choose him—that they abandoned him, sent him away or gave him up.

“The immature ego cannot cope with the knowledge of the rejection by its original parents,” Dr. Schechter concludes. “The