

MEDICINE

Frequent Pregnancy Tests

Frequent easy and inexpensive pregnancy tests in women of child-bearing age can prevent disasters such as thalidomide babies and harmful X-ray effects—By Faye Marley

► FUTURE THALIDOMIDE disasters could be prevented among women of child-bearing age by frequent, even daily, testing for pregnancy.

Easy and inexpensive tests are now available that will establish the existence of pregnancy within four days of conception, Dr. Dale G. Friend of Harvard Medical School said at the American Medical Association meeting in Atlantic City.

With the early test, 90% of the pregnancies would be determined as early as four days and doctors would then know not to prescribe possibly harmful drugs. Making the test would also be especially important before a physician takes a series of X-rays that might harm the fetus.

Thalidomide slipped through despite the best of screening techniques on animals and humans, but if drug experiments are stopped many valuable and safe drugs will be lost. Highly critical persons are needed in places where scientists are working to look over their shoulders to prevent accidents.

Expert consulting panels were proposed to achieve greater safety in evaluating new drugs and their relations to human beings.

This evaluation requires individuals with the highest motivation, training and skill, Dr. Friend said.

Efforts are being made to establish departments of clinical pharmacology in various medical centers as a solution to this problem. The American Medical Association has announced it will establish and operate a new Institute for Biomedical Research. It will be dedicated to pure, non-disease research, and will not render medical service to patients.

Experimenters should always know the chemical formulas of the drugs they are testing if at all possible. No one should be testing "esoteric soup," unspecified mixtures of chemicals.

Experimental drug patients should always be told that they are being given new drugs that might worsen their condition, Dr. Friend said. To protect both the patient and the experimenter, insurance policies should include drug testing. The risk would be very small, since there are fewer accidents caused by drugs than by automobiles.

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Add Two Pounds Daily

► POTATO CHIPS and pretzels along with salty ham can raise your weight two or three pounds in one day, Dr. Garfield G. Duncan of Pennsylvania Hospital, Philadelphia, said.

Dr. Duncan reported at the American Medical Association meeting in Atlantic City that he has followed up for three years 415 obese patients who have been on a two-week regimen of total fasting at the hospital. He said some 300-pounders have lost as much as ten pounds in one day when they omit salt. Salt retention causes excess body fluid.

Of the more than 400 patients, 20% are continuing to lose weight after leaving the hospital because they are allowing themselves only about 1,500 calories a day. Forty percent are maintaining their original reduction, which was about 25 pounds in the two weeks of fasting. Those who have gone back to their original high weight of 250 to 300 pounds are considered in need of a psychiatrist. They are compulsive eaters.

"We discovered that 60% of the patients who weigh more than 300 pounds have gallstones, 45% have diabetes and 15% to 20% have high blood pressure," Dr. Duncan said. Mild diabetes and hypertension improve on the fasting program.

If you are only 15 or 20 pounds over-

weight you need not go on a fasting diet, Dr. Duncan said. Merely reducing fat intake and exercising more will take care of the problem.

"We do not advise sudden exercise because of the strain on the heart," he explained. "Obese patients are advised to start slowly, walking on flat ground. Gradually they can build up to a game of golf."

No drug is used to reduce appetite in the Pennsylvania Hospital fasting treatment, although Dr. Duncan said for those outside the hospital such drugs are permissible one day a week. Oftener than that they tend to become ineffective.

Only water, weak tea and vitamins are given the hospitalized patients, but inactivity is part of the treatment. This is why total fasting would not work at home. One day a week fasting is desirable when the patient is released, however.

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AMA Gives Syphilis Tests

► A SMALL SAMPLE of blood from each of some 2,000 doctors, 400,000 June brides and grooms and one reporter has been sent to a laboratory for testing.

Each sample will be mixed with extracts from the body or blood of animals or com-

bined with blood from syphilis patients. From this brew, the lab can tell if any of the 402,001 has syphilis.

The doctors need the test to check for possible accidental infection from syphilitic patients.

The brides and grooms need the test before, in most states, marriage licenses will be issued.

And the reporter took the test as a part of the complete physical examination given at the American Medical Association annual meeting at Atlantic City.

Blood pressure and cholesterol tests, urine analyses and electrocardiograms are checked to see if all the body systems are behaving as they should.

An estimated 20% of the doctors examined will show borderline or abnormal heart conditions.

Most of the physicians attending the meetings are paunchy, middle-aged, busy men, just ripe for heart attacks. They are as notorious for ignoring their own advice about physical examinations as reporters once were for their dissipation.

Few will follow through on these preliminary physicals, Dr. Charles E. McArthur, Olympia, Wash., chairman of the physical examination exhibit, sadly said. "They just don't have time."

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Tobacco and Integration

► THE AMERICAN Medical Association has taken two cautious, middle-of-the-road stands on two national problems:

1. Smoking.
2. Integration.

Tobacco was branded as a "toxic," or poisonous material for the young but not for adults, based on incomplete information.

While this action was being taken Negro and white doctors were picketing other doctors over the question of the AMA's racial policy.

The pickets were demanding direct membership in the AMA to get around the fact that in many parts of the country state and county groups deny membership on the basis of race.

AMA officials said it is unlikely there will be any change in their racial policy.

The AMA House of Delegates did, however, adopt a report regarding smoking. It says:

"In the light of our present knowledge, however incomplete it might be, your reference committee believes the AMA has a duty to point out the effect on the young of the use of toxic materials, including tobacco, and that these facts should be disseminated, particularly in our schools."

The House of Delegates then adopted another resolution which said it "cannot incriminate a single factor" in regard to smoking as a cause of disease until the U.S. Public Health Service completes its study on the subject.

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Nearly half of America's estimated three million *diabetics* do not even know they have the disease.