

## Curing the Obese; diuretics questioned

The idea that excessive weight is partly the result of too much water is a medical hypothesis that has gained considerable currency. Diuretic drugs that flush excess fluids out of body tissues are often considered valuable therapy for overweight patients. Recently this idea came under attack at the Eighth International Dietetic Congress in Geneva. The meeting, attended by more than 100 scientists from 17 countries, was devoted to obesity.

**Pharmaceutical** companies continue to advertise, even in their displays outside the conference hall, the "precious adjuvant" that diuretics are in obesity therapy. One actually claimed that obesity is "always" linked to water retention.

Many physicians reported diuretics are not worth much in treating heavy patients. "There is no water retention in obese patients who do not suffer from heart or kidney problems," according to Dr. Michel Demole, congress chairman. Several laboratory investigations in Switzerland, France and Belgium support him.

The idea that water loss is directly related to weight loss can even have a negative effect on patients. Scientists observed that many patients make no real effort to reduce food intake when they lose water.

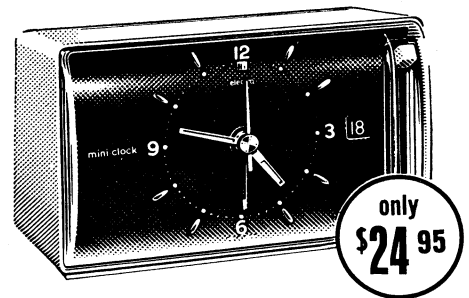
Other investigators reported studies confirming that animals given very little water produce more fat than those drinking more, even when calorie intake is the same. European pork producers have known this—and watered their stock accordingly—for a long time.

Dr. Raymond Martin du-Pan of Geneva has been giving 50 overweight children water with their meals. Although proof will be difficult, he says preliminary evidence encourages him in thinking that water helps them to stay close to normal weight.

**Though diuretics** may not be a rational way to tip the scales in a downward direction, appetite-suppressing drugs continue to be a mainstay of diet therapy. Teams of scientists in Western Europe and one in Montevideo have been working with Roche Laboratories' new product called Pondinil. The drug represents an attempt by the giant drug house to rearrange amphetamine—pep pill—molecules in order to make an anti-appetite drug that works in constant doses. Amphetamines which are currently used for this purpose are well tolerated by the body so that, over a period of time, larger and larger doses are needed.

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Once patients lose weight on Pondinil, several teams report, a single pill a day keeps them on a plateau.

However, early lab studies by Roche scientists indicate that once in the body, Pondinil is broken down just as amphetamines are. This may qualify the early optimism.

Perhaps the most effective way to weight loss is the old fashioned starvation diet which means exactly what it says—no food. Work by Dr. Georg Hartmann and his colleagues at the University of Basel show that this drastic approach is not dangerous under careful supervision. He insists that patients on a starvation diet should be kept in the hospital in case any "accidents" occur.

His patients take only fluids, "as much as they like," and vitamins, but no minerals. "We suspect that vitamin B<sub>1</sub> alone works," Dr. Hartmann says on the basis of tests on 15 individuals. The average duration of the "absolute fast" treatment is 18 days, with an average weight loss of 19.8 pounds—five or six pounds of it water.

Chances are that the starvation diet has saved the lives of many obese diabetics and heart patients in whom excess weight is extremely dangerous. But Dr. Hartmann also advocates this method for any fat person who has tried other methods and failed.

David Alan Ehrlich

#### FROM MEXICO

### Nuclear Progress: 'Snail's Pace'

As Mexico moves cautiously into the atomic age, spokesmen for industry and government are trading accusations over who is to blame for the slow pace.

The private National Chamber of Manufacturing Industries (CNIT), criticizing the snail's pace of Mexican nuclear development, complains about the limited budget for atomic research. In a recent article in its monthly publication TRANSFORMATION, nuclear energy was pictured as the main hope for irrigating Mexico's vast unproductive desert areas, and supplying cheap electric power for industry.

Dr. Jose Gorostiza, chairman of the Mexican Nuclear Energy Commission, counters by saying that money from private industry would be welcome. But he points out that so far he has received no concrete cash proposals.

Mexico's first nuclear power plant, a small research reactor being built by the U.S., at Salazar in the state of Mexico, is expected to go into operation in 1967. Dr. Gorostiza said the reactor

should begin next year to produce radioisotopes for industry, medicine and agriculture.

Also in the works are uranium ore processing plants. The first plant, to be built in the northern state of Chihuahua, will have a capacity of 25 tons daily. Mexico's known uranium reserves are an estimated 800,000 tons.

Uranium production is another area in which government and industry spokesmen clash. In 1955, uranium and all other radioactive materials were declared national properties, with exploitation only undertaken by the government. Export of uranium is also prohibited. These laws have dulled interest of private prospectors searching for uranium deposits, according to industry sources.

To stimulate exploration, the government has initiated a cash incentive program for prospectors who uncover new uranium ore sites. But how much cash is actually paid hasn't been officially revealed, and one source indicates that they were merely token payments.

Emil Zubryn

#### FROM WALES

### Student Vocabulary

British University science students have poor vocabularies and find it difficult to express themselves. They resent having this pointed out to them and see no reason why they should try to improve.

These are some of the results of a survey by the Welsh College of Advanced Technology, Cardiff. More than 2,000 undergraduates, studying a wide range of subjects, took extensive vocabulary and comprehension tests.

In all tests, the scientists, engineers and agricultural students, in descending order, did consistently worse than arts and social science students.

All the words were nontechnical and were chosen from newspapers and magazines. Many were from popular scientific journals.

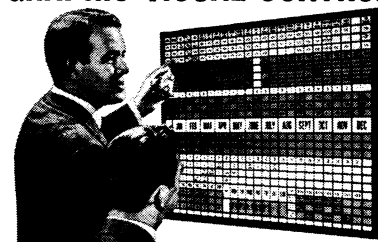
Howlers abounded. "Dissemination" was defined as class distinction, cutting up animals for scientific research, removal of ovaries, leaving the church, and an injection to prevent childbirth. "Lucid" emerged as hard to find, lewd, dishonest, flexible and free from inhibitions.

Students who did badly were hostile in their comments. One science student said: "We don't need fancy vocabulary—we can do it in maths."

The deterioration in science students' vocabulary appeared to start when they began to specialize in science.

F. C. Livingston

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