

## MEDICINE

# Vitamin E Hailed as Possible Cure for Hopeless Disease

## Hitherto Incurable Muscle Ill Aided by Wheat Germ; May Help in Infantile Paralysis and Locomotor Ataxia

**V**ITAMIN E, known as the fertility vitamin from wheat germ, is being hailed in medical circles in London as a probable cure for hitherto hopeless diseases of muscle weakness and nerve degeneration.

It is also seen as a possible means of protecting children against infantile paralysis and adults against one horrible result of syphilitic infection, locomotor ataxia.

Striking results in treating more than a score of human patients suffering from incurable and even fatal muscle weakness and nerve degenerative diseases with vitamin E are reported by Dr. Franklin Bicknell, honorary physician to the Farrington Dispensary in London. (*The Lancet*, Jan. 6.)

The vitamin should also be used to protect children against infantile paralysis, at least during epidemics, Dr. Bicknell declares, though his report does not include such use of the treatment. He believes that in children who have a diet rich in this vitamin the nerve and brain cells attacked by infantile paralysis virus will be more resistant.

### Why Some Are Affected

Lack of this vitamin in the diet, apparently necessary for nerve and muscle health as well as for normal reproduction, may explain why some patients with syphilis later develop locomotor ataxia while others do not. Arrest of this painful, disabling condition may be possible with the vitamin treatment, Dr. Bicknell believes. He tried it, without success, in two cases, but the condition was too far advanced in these patients for the negative results to show what the vitamin treatment can do.

Locomotor ataxia, he believes, may be the result not of syphilitic infection alone but also of a deficiency of vitamin E causing a degeneration of nerve tracts already weakened by syphilis.

Muscular dystrophy, amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, peroneal muscular atrophy and amyotonia congenita are the muscle and nerve disorders for which Dr. Bicknell used the wheat germ or vitamin E

treatment. Results of treatment in the muscle weakness condition were remarkable, every patient except one, even bedridden patients, showing improvement.

These patients, 15 of them children, are apparently the first humans to receive the new vitamin treatment, although the discoverer of the vitamin, Dr. Herbert M. Evans, of the University of California, reported success in vitamin E treatment of similar muscular weakness and wasting in animals.

### Seldom Eaten

Vitamin E has been called the fertility vitamin because it is necessary for normal reproduction, but Dr. Bicknell suggests that the substance in wheat germ which produced striking improvement in his patients may be something other than the fertility vitamin. For this reason, suggested by animal studies, he used fresh dried whole wheat germ, one-half

ounce twice daily, to treat patients, rather than the chemical, alpha tocopherol, which has been identified as the pure form of the anti-sterility vitamin.

"Our diet may in some cases be on the edge of a vitamin E deficiency," Dr. Bicknell charges, pointing out that the most important food source of this vitamin, wheat germ, "is to all intents and purposes never eaten" because it is removed from the wheat flour in ordinary milling processes. Other foods containing small amounts of the vitamin may lose it in the course of storage and preparation.

*Science News Letter, February 10, 1940*

## PHYSIOLOGY

## Fat Men Can Drink More Than Can Thin Men

**G**OOD NEWS, or perhaps it is bad news, for fat men: From Berkeley, Calif., comes the observation by Dr. Emil Bogen, National Safety Council committee member studying intoxication tests, that fat men can drink more than thin men under normal conditions. The reason is that intoxication is caused by concentration of alcohol in the blood stream; fat men usually have more blood than their thinner brothers engaged in alcoholic exercises.

*Science News Letter, February 10, 1940*



### ANCIENT ART

A 20,000-year-old outdoor art gallery showing mammoths and other animals painted by Old Stone Age artists is the discovery of a Ukrainian Academy of Sciences expedition. Found on rocks by the Azov Sea in far southern Russia, the paintings are pronounced first of such antiquity detected in the USSR. This view appears to be a doe preceding a reindeer.