

MEDICINE

Injury to Nervous System Causes "Rubens' Venus" Type

Severe Disturbance of Internal Glands Controlled By Midbrain Causes Maldistribution of Body Fat

DID YOU ever see a painting of Venus by the classic artist Rubens? As he liked to paint the goddess, she appeared thin in the face and slim in the upper part of her body, but from amidships on she was—well, just plain fat. Very fat. (Rubens, you know, was the painter of whom some one said that he bought canvas by the acre, hired models by the ton.)

But that peculiar type of fatness, the massing of adipose tissue in the lower part of the body, is really a disease—lypodystrophy, to be technical about it. At the meeting of the American Academy of Pediatrics in Washington Dr. P. A. McLendon of George Washington University discussed its occurrence and described a case that came under his own observation.

The patient was a little girl eight years old. Scarlet fever occurred after removal of tonsils and adenoids, followed by an acute kidney infection. The normal deposits of fat beneath the skin disappeared from her face and neck and the upper part of her trunk. "The lower trunk and thighs give the impression of excessive fat deposit—a "Rubens' Venus."

This maldistribution of body fat is a rare disease; only about 100 cases have been described in the medical literature since its first discovery in 1885. Some of the cases show a history of skull injury, others the occurrence of acute infection that affects one section of the midbrain. Apparently the one fac-

tor in common is a severe disturbance of certain internal glands which are under control of that part of the brain.

Taught to See Straight

SEEING correctly is taught to small children afflicted with poor sight in one eye with consequent squinting, by making them use the poor eye exclusively for a time, and then admitting the good eye to a reduced share in the work of vision, Prof. William Thornwall Davis of George Washington University told the Academy.

At first, the good eye is taken out of use by simply putting a patch over it. Later, glasses are fitted with the lens over the good eye purposely made partially opaque. With only dim vision available, the child is not tempted to leave the poor eye unused, but exercises it until it has been trained to see better, and above all until the little patient ceases to turn it in. With patience, such discipline can be taught to most four-year-old children, Prof. Davis reported: "It takes an average of one year to correct a case of purely accommodative squint."

Ills from Vitamin Lack

YOU CAN have three different diseases, either separately or all at once (or your choice of any two), from lack of one or another of the half-dozen known parts of what used to be thought a single vitamin but is now called the B complex. You can have a touch of pellagra, or a bit of beriberi, or an attack of blinding keratitis.

This picture of the pathological Pandora's box that can be opened by failure to get your vitamin B complex was sketched by Dr. W. H. Sebrell of the U. S. Public Health Service, speaking before the meeting of the American Academy of Pediatrics.

These ill consequences of various vitamin B lacks are especially distressing as they appear in children, Dr. Sebrell pointed out, because they often go un-

recognized for what they are. Diagnosis is exceedingly difficult in many cases. One symptom of one of the diseases may appear, unaccompanied by any of the others that facilitate recognition of the malady when it appears in more typical, pronounced form in adults.

Pellagra and beriberi used to be considered "regional" diseases, the first of poverty-stricken neighborhoods in the South and the second of the Orient. However, greater clinical experience has shown that they are exceedingly widespread, at least in their milder, less easily recognizable forms. Furthermore, the speaker emphasized, none of the deficiency diseases due to lack of vitamin B complex is confined to the poorer social groups. Even the rich can suffer from the "hidden hungers" brought on by ill-balanced diet or failure by individual patients to absorb necessary vitamins after they have swallowed them.

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PHYSIOLOGY

Atom Smasher Helps Time Passage of Iron in Body

USE of the cyclotron, giant atom-smasher, to help time the passage of blood-building iron from food through the digestive tract was announced by Drs. David M. Greenberg, of the University of California, and Mario E. Austoni, University of Rome.

Unexpected new fact discovered in these studies is that about one-half of the iron absorbed by the body, representing one-fourth of that given the animals under study, accumulated in the muscles. No muscle storage of iron had previously been discovered, it is stated.

Iron tagged with radioactivity conferred on it in the cyclotron was given the test animals. About 12 hours were required for a single test dose to pass through the stomach and small intestines. Passage of iron through the digestive tract was found significantly slower in anemic rats than in normal ones. During a 10-day period the normal animals retained about 30% of the administered iron while the anemic animals retained about 50%.

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