

GERIATRICS

From Now On: Oldsters

Older people have important contributions to make to society although their pace may be necessarily slower. Their potentialities should be utilized to the fullest.

By WATSON DAVIS

Eleventh in a series of glances forward in science.

► SO far this has been the child's century. Most babies are born not merely to die. The family, school and community have joined to make childhood a more satisfactory experience, leading to more adequate adults than ever before.

One result of this emphasis upon the child, coupled with the progress of medicine and public health, is that our population is older if not wiser. There are more oldsters, proportionately. Most of us live longer. So our public health people are looking now in midcentury to old people, much as they did years ago to the children.

There is not the emotional appeal in gray hair and stiff joints that there is in blonde curls and toddling. Nurseries will out-draw old folks' homes in a popularity contest. But the world has the older people in it, more than ever, and it is going to make the best of it—for them.

Recognizing that age is not merely a matter of years is a first step. Some people are older and some younger than their years. As the health experts put it, physiological age may be different from chronological age.

No one who avoids the hazards of accident and disease to live to an old age needs to expect to avoid the physiological breakdown that ends in inevitable death. The coming era of the oldsters is not aimed at that. It should be possible to keep people physically vigorous and effectively at work beyond the conventional retirement ages.

Doctors, drugs and right living cannot do it all, but attitudes and prejudices have to be changed. Employers need to know what and how the older people can continue to do jobs. The oldsters must feel capable and adequate. They mirror the prejudices and feelings of the younger people about them. Simultaneously, they create their own lessened usefulness by lack of confidence and willingness to let down because of age.

No school child or job applicant gets away from the aptitude tests and diagnosis procedure that tell with extraordinary success what a youngster should try to do, what he needs to learn and what job is best fitted to him. There should be aptitude tests for those beyond the first six decades of life. Ways that the older men and women can find out what they will do most successfully as the years change them.

The marvelous accomplishments of the handicapped of younger years will inspire

and reconcile those who find that aging involves changing abilities and changing pace. Physiological reserves of all of us change with the years and our resources will last longer if we know how to enhance them and when and how to husband them.

Factories are normally built for those in the prime of life, yet it would be good business for machinery to be made so that it is fitted to older workers who may have a slower reaction time, less stamina and perhaps more patience.

CHEMISTRY

Blossoms without Fruit

► HORSE-CHESTNUT trees without their familiar burrs, or honey locusts which will not drop large, purplish-black fruit pods all over your front lawn, may be the next job of new chemical "growth regulators" being tested in Wenatchee, Wash., by U. S. Department of Agriculture scientists.

Such sprays are now being used in Washington apple orchards as a new way of thinning the fruit load on a tree. They can partially "defruit" over-enthusiastic trees which begin to grow more apples than the trees can nourish to proper market size.

This thinning power of the "growth regulators", when used in the spring blossoming season, is all the more remarkable because the same sort of compounds when used in the fall will hold full-grown apples to the trees and prevent dropping.

Dr. L. P. Batjer, horticulturist at the U. S. D. A. Field Laboratory in Wenatchee, was one of the researchers who developed so-called "stick-tight" pre-harvest apple spraying. Now working on the defruiting powers of growth regulators, he points out that such compounds may be extremely valuable in controlling the nuisance fruit grown by many U. S. ornamental and shade trees.

It may be possible to develop a spray which would eliminate the unsightly useless fruit of such trees as the horse-chestnut, honey locust, catalpa, European ash, and eastern poplar, yet retain the beautiful blossoming powers of the trees, Dr. Batjer believes.

A similar prediction comes from the University of North Carolina. Preliminary work by research botanists with the chemical maleic hydrazide has already prevented the ginkgo tree from developing its malodorous, disagreeable fruit.

Many homes have nurseries and play rooms that in time are outgrown. More and more homes in our older world should be rearranged to suit the convenience of those no longer young.

In the old folks' world emerging, expect to see:

A. More attention to the causes and treatments of chronic diseases will make it possible to live into the later years of life with more health.

B. When it is found what are the nutritional needs of older people, there will be age-rated diets and special foods available in the stores, much as baby foods are now sold.

C. Communities and states will begin concerted efforts to rehabilitate, reactivate and reinspire the older people in order to make them more productive to society, less burdensome financially and, above all, happier.

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The growth regulators have sometimes been termed miracle drugs in the world of plant science. Most notable among them is the war-developed chemical 2,4-D. Now widely used as a weed-killer, 2,4-D does its work by over-stimulating plants to death, scientists believe.

Although 2,4-D has been used experimentally as a thinning spray for fruit trees, agriculture scientists say it is dangerous. It sometimes damages the foliage of sensitive trees. In the experiments being carried on at Wenatchee, naphthalene acetic acid and its sodium salt are among those found most successful.

Science News Letter, June 10, 1950

AGRICULTURE

Buy Frozen Apple Juice After Apple Season

► WHEN apple-picking season rolls around this year, frozen concentrated apple juice will not be far behind.

Scientists at the Department of Agriculture's Western Regional Research Laboratory in Albany, Calif., say that they are not the only researchers working on frozen apple juice. Commercial packers are nearly ready to put the new product on the market.

Two methods of concentrating the essence of the apple—and having it still in the can for addition of water later—are being worked on. One is to separate the volatile essence and the juice, concentrate each separately, and mix them together again before freezing. The other is to make a much more concentrated mash, then add fresh, unconcentrated apple juice just before freezing. The latter method is used in the manufacture of frozen orange juice.

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