

MEDICINE

Study Heart Imbalance

An operation that can be performed to remedy an electrical imbalance in the heart was described to scientists at the annual meeting of the American Medical Association.

SUDDEN DEATH can occur to a person because his heart "electrocutes" itself.

Many of these persons could be saved if the proper precautions were taken, Dr. Claude S. Beck of Western Reserve University reported. More than 100,000 persons may die each year because of an electrical imbalance that can be avoided by surgery, the professor of cardiovascular surgery estimated.

He explained that coronary artery disease produces an uneven or checkerboard distribution of blood in the heart muscle. This causes an electrical imbalance which results in sudden death. Autopsy never reveals the cause of such deaths because there is no observable tell-tale physical damage to the heart.

Dr. Beck explained the course of the disease this way:

The coronary artery feeds the heart muscle with blood. This artery becomes narrowed or blocked, reducing the amount of blood in the heart muscle itself, causing a checkerboard distribution of blood.

While nothing can be done to increase the amount of blood to the heart muscle, Dr. Beck's operation can ration or more evenly distribute blood that is reaching the heart muscle.

His operation consists of opening the sac surrounding the heart. Then he places a chemical such as powdered asbestos on the heart muscle. This causes a minor inflammation which in turn creates small connections or pathways between the heart muscle blood vessels. Thus the flow of blood in the muscle is more even and prevents the development of electrical imbalance.

The risk of this operation is about three percent in those patients with good hearts, Dr. Beck told colleagues attending the American Medical Association meeting in Atlantic City.

The operation must be performed before the heart muscles are damaged by the lack of blood flow, he emphasized. "Indeed, it is more dangerous to take your chances of dying without operation than it is to have it done," he said.

Spaceman's Dessert

COOKIES can be made from algae, the green growth that floats on ponds.

They taste good and are nutritious, Edith Katherine Schuele, a 15-year-old high school junior from Memphis, Tenn., explained to doctors attending the Medical Association meeting.

Edith exhibited cookies, cinnamon pin-wheels, French bread and cheese swirls that she made from algae. Currently algae is being considered as a food that could

be grown aboard rocket ships for space crews on extended trips.

The use of algae in foods increases the protein content by 20% and the fat content by 75%, explained Edith, who won in May the top AMA award at the National Science Fair in Hartford, Conn. (See SNL, May 23, p. 325.)

One tablespoon of algae equals the nutritional value of one ounce of steak. Space men may prefer the steak, but algae would be a more efficient food source on a long trip into space.

In addition to its nutritional value, growing algae could convert carbon dioxide exhaled by the crew into life-sustaining oxygen.

Edith said she grew the algae, spun it in a centrifuge and heated it to obtain a powder. This powder tastes similar to broccoli, she said. Other scientists reported that algae, when aged, tastes like prunes.

"Merchants of Menace"

THE "MERCHANTS OF MENACE," door to door food fad salesmen, received a sharp rap from the American Medical Association's Council on Foods and Nutrition.

A growing corps of false health lecturers, food faddists and nutrition "experts" is waiting to take you on a whirl of nutrition nonsense, the Council warned physicians attending the meeting.

These salesmen deal in myths, false claims and misrepresentations. They build and prey upon the fear of an imaginary illness.

One salesman's pitch, an actual recording by a Government investigator, went something like this: "this (food) product has completely cured my cancer." Another salesman claimed that his product cured him of a number of diseases ranging from heart disease to arthritis, "I got hold of this product through divine revelation," he said.

Hundreds of salesmen offer as remedies mixtures of vitamins, minerals, alfalfa, watercress, parsley, kelp (seaweed), royal jelly, special fatty acids, oysters, lecithin, herbs and roots.

The black silk hat and tie may be gone but the old medicine man still hawks his wares from door to door, claiming to be a health expert.

Persons who believe that by taking these preparations they will cure some disease may have to turn to a doctor when it is too late for the doctor to help, the Council stressed.

The various types of food quackery practiced in the United States today, specific samples of such foods, and recordings of sales conversations were presented at the AMA's annual meeting.

(For other reports on medical research presented at the American Medical Association meeting in Atlantic City, see pages 389 and 397.)

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IKE GREET'S YOUTH—President Eisenhower congratulated Martin J. Murphy Jr., left, of Colorado Springs, Colo., and Edith Katherine Schuele. (See accompanying story.) He discussed their exhibits, which were on display during the AMA's annual meeting, with the young National Science Fair winners. The President was guest speaker at the Association's inaugural ceremony.