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**What is Your Child When He is Malnourished?**

By ELIZABETH STORM, Home Demonstration Agent, Webster County

"HEALTH." How often we hear that word and yet how few of us could define it! Still fewer of us appreciate it when we have it and only a small number of us devote any time or thought to maintaining the health that we have. It is only when we are really ill, when the Death Angel seems just around the corner, that we take health seriously.

We say that health is a good deal a state of mind, as happiness, and surely that is true. Frankly, the trouble with the average interpretation of health is that it is too general. If the body, or some portion of it, is not completely exhausted, we consider ourselves "tolerably well," and go calmly on. Especially is this disregard for warnings true with children. Light ailments are taken lightly. Cold, stomach and intestinal troubles, and fits of temper are all passed over as necessary evils in the development of the child.

Infants suffer most from this misunderstanding. It is appalling the number of supposedly "good" mothers who really believe that colic is as essential in a baby's development as are finger nails. These same mothers are apt to believe that the appearance of teeth upsets the whole digestive system, and can seldom be persuaded that the trouble and pain at time of teething is due to over or incorrect feeding.

Until recent years there has been practically no definite index to health. After many experiments and years of work, observation, doctors and nurses have agreed that health is expressed in pounds per inch of stature, according to age. Children are weighed and measured, and these figures should correspond somewhat to their age. With adults it is a little more difficult, since many grown-ups are suffering from lack of care when children, and therefore cannot reach the standard qualifications.

Now, what does an under-weight child look like? Can you tell him by sight? That depends. With a little work with children it is possible to look into the faces of a roomful of them and pick out almost automatically all under-weight children. Every coffee drinker. Very often the two go together. They are easy to discern to a trained eye, but a pair of scales tell a story that none can dispute.

But how can a mother tell whether or not her child is under-weight? Doctor William R. P. Emerson, whose articles you have all seen in the Woman's Home Companion, gives the following as signs of malnutrition.

**Physical Signs.**—Pale, lines under the eyes, lips parted—mouth breathing, muscles flabby, round shoulders, "angel wings" shoulder blades, stooping posture, spinal curvature, prominent abdomen, inability to wear belts, indigestible food, nervousness, irritability, crying easily, says "no" to everything, night terrors, forgetful, inattentive, loses temper over little things, and worries himself and everyone else.

The physical signs are made sure by the nurse, but if the mother is present at the examination her remark is apt to be, "Bob is so nervous and cross; he torments his little sister and the kitten lives in terror. He seems to be getting thin, too." Or she may admit slowly that "Mary seems so dull and listless of late. Her grades have fallen and she doesn't seem to take the interest in her music that she used to." The nurse will probably pronounce the case "malnutrition," and the little mother is astounded to find that her child is under-nourished—when she is considered one of the best cooks in town!!

**Faulty food habits are not always to blame for under-nourished conditions.** However, the most important of the causes are:

1. The child does not get sufficient food.
2. He does not get the right kind of food. He spoils his appetite for simple foods, as milk, cereals and vegetables, by excessive indulgence in candy, sweets, pastry and other indigestible food.
3. He eats irregularly between meals, spoiling his digestion by cakes and trash.
4. He bols his food, never taking time to chew his food properly, but washes it down with water.
5. He drinks tea and coffee instead of milk and water.
6. He does not get enough sleep.
7. He suffers from habitual constipation.
8. He gets too much emotional excitement, such as movies.
9. He is overworked in school or out, perhaps with music lessons after school.
10. He plays too hard.
11. He may have decayed teeth, enlarged or diseased tonsils or adenoids, which will prevent proper development.

You may be wondering just which of these reaches your child. Watch him at work and play, at meal times and in his sleep, and you can readily tell. Then you want to know just how much under-weight a child must be before he is considered in a serious condition. Doctors differ on that point, but it is safe to say that if your child is seven percent from normal, he had better be attended to. It is not often that we have to reckon with the over-weight child, but his condition warrants attention, too. Where health clinics are maintained, and more than seven percent under weight or over weight are put into the classes and helped to gain or lose as the case may be. So, if your younger lacks seven percent of weighing what he ought, it would be wise to see that he has no physical defects to hinder his gain, and then look into his daily habits of eating and living. If he is free to gain, it is only a problem of time and patience and cooperation on the part of the child. Weight charts are very valuable in this work, because the youngster can watch his weight curve creep up toward his normal weight line, and feel well repaid for his efforts.

If these are not available from the county nurse, or a doctor's office, they are readily made by squaring off a large sheet of paper into one-quarter-inch squares, then labeling. This is started at the lower left-hand corner of the chart with zero, going vertically up the left-hand side, naming the horizontal lines, 5, 10, 15 pounds, up to at least twenty pounds more than the child weighs at present. Starting from the same corner, and going horizontally, the vertical lines are dated as often as you weigh the child. The health curve is plotted between the line of the date and the line indicating his present weight, then continue to the intersection made at his next weighing, and the chart will indicate his exact gain or loss.

"As Dr. Harris says:
Health is the big purpose of life;
Health causes us to think and act wisely;
Health makes us out-to-stay strong and active;
Health keeps our morals high;
Health makes us obedient to God."

Whatever your method of guidance may be, keep close watch on the condition of your child, correct his deficiencies and make him strong, so that he need not be pronounced "malnourished!"