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Have You Analyzed Your Headache?

HHEADACHE is a common and frequent complaint. A number of theories have been advanced as to the cause of headaches and many suggestions given for its treatment.

There are various kinds of headaches and they differ greatly in respect to cause, location, severity, frequency and effect on the individuals. Dr. Pavey-Smith of England says, "Headache may be associated with almost any form of illness; may be so trivial and so persistent as in time to be regarded as normal; may be so severe as to make life nearly intolerable; and there is hardly a symptom so common and at the same time so little understood."

The severe form of headache, as sick headache and blind headache, is known as migraine. Medical authorities differ as to its origin. Heredity and nervous disorders have been suggested as possible causes. Migraine appears in early childhood or youth and may continue for years, but rarely does it begin after a person reaches twenty years of age.

A partial list of the general causes of headaches includes eye strain, nervous strain, acute infection as cold or grippe, constipation, worry and infection of the nasal sinuses. However, some headaches can not be explained by any of the above causes. Dr. Brown of Baltimore thinks that in such cases diet plays a role. An excessive intake of carbohydrate foods, as rice, potatoes, macaroni, bread and sugar, or an excessive intake of protein foods, as meat, fish, eggs and cheese, are thought to be possible causes of headache. Dilation of the stomach is also suspected of causing headache.

An excessive carbohydrate intake may mean too much carbohydrate eaten or it may mean an intake of carbohydrate in excess of the body's ability to utilize it thoroughly. This suggests some defect in the individual's carbohydrate metabolism. Many instances have been noted in which patients have a headache following an excessive intake of some carbohydrate food, frequently sugar.

The treatment suggested for this type of headache is to put the patient for two or three weeks on a diet consisting largely of proteins, fats, greens and acid fruits with no sugar or starch except that found in the above foods. An effort is made to keep the weight constant by giving cream, fat, olive oil and later adding small amounts of carbohydrate such as one or two slices of bread or toast and one or two potatoes daily. This diet, more or less restricted in starches, must be adhered to for a long time and sometimes indefinitely. For example, one of Dr. Brown's patients who suffered terribly from headaches was put on the above diet ten years ago and for the past ten years has been practically free from headaches. It is Dr. Brown's belief, based on his extensive experience, that

a real cure may be obtained in many cases of headache and a very marked relief in others if the proper dietetic treatment is followed.

If it is found for the individual that a lowered carbohydrate intake does give relief, it may be necessary for the individual to continue permanently on the lowered carbohydrate diet. The person afflicted with headaches should determine for himself just how much carbohydrate he can tolerate in his diet. If relief from the headache is obtained on the low carbohydrate diet and the headache returns when more carbohydrate is eaten, then the low carbohydrate diet should be followed and the carbohydrate food which brought on the return of headache should be excluded permanently from the diet.

Headaches due to protein intake may be as frequent or more frequent than those resulting from an excessive carbohydrate intake. Dr. Brown of Mentone, France, is of the opinion that all nitrogenous foods—animal or vegetable—contain potential poison and if the metabolic capacity of an individual is insufficient to deal with the poison of the particular protein concerned, then certain manifestations occur, of which headache is the most common. These manifestations or results may be slow in developing as in arteriosclerosis or nephritis, or they may be sudden as in migraine.

In treating headaches caused theoretically by protein intake, the results are obtained by complete removal of the protein, especially the animal protein, from the diet for several weeks and then gradually adding small amounts of the various proteins. The foods found most potent in producing headaches are meat, fish, poultry, game and extracts in the form of soup and gravies made from them; eggs, milk and cheese; fruit and fruit juices; coffee, tea, chocolate and alcohol and vegetables as tomatoes and mushrooms. This leaves cereals, butter and vegetables which may be consumed freely. Dr. Brown's basic diet is made up of polished rice, butter, toast, green vegetables and water. He states that the results of treating patients on the above diet are usually as follows:

The first week: Many patients respond with an immediate improvement, but a few are worse.

The second week: Considerable improvement noticed.

The third week: In the majority of cases a decided improvement is noticed.

When the headache is distinctly improved on the restricted diet, other foods should be added to the diet slowly; first, other vegetables, then small amounts of meats once daily. Milk may be used in cooking and different protein foods added from time to time until a tolerance for different foods is obtained.

Soups, meat, fruit and eggs are foods which usually can not be taken

in any quantity. Sweetbreads, mushrooms, chocolate and tomatoes are frequently banned entirely. In some instances, one particular protein may be the only offending one. For example: some people can not tolerate coffee, but they can drink tea. In other instances several proteins may have to be eliminated from the diet. A good plan to follow is to suspect all protein foods until by the experience of the individual they have been proven harmless. In general, a fairly generous diet may be taken if certain offending proteins are omitted and the diet kept fairly low in protein food.

The theory of dilation or distention of the stomach as a cause of migraine is discussed by Janet L. Grieg in the British Medical Journal. She thinks that recurrent attacks of dilation of the stomach cause migraine and suggests the following scheme, which endeavors to keep the stomach in the normal physiological condition. Results from the following of her suggestions have been found satisfactory. The plan of treatment is as follows:

Exclude rigidly from the diet:

1. Cakes, scones, biscuits, pastry.
2. Steamed puddings, sponge puddings, trifles.
4. Aerated drinks, fruit salts, sal hepatica, etc.

Allow any of the following:

For breakfast: Porridge, fish, eggs, bacon, chops, bread and butter, toast, marmalade, jam, tea or coffee.

For luncheon: Soup, fish, meat (all kinds), potatoes, marrow, pumpkin, tomatoes, milk puddings, custard, junket, stewed fruits, baked apples, fresh fruit.

For afternoon tea: Bread and butter, toast and butter, sandwiches, tea or coffee.

For dinner: Soup, fish, meat, poultry, potatoes, marrow, pumpkin, tomatoes, custard, jellies, fruit salad, ice cream, fresh fruit, coffee.

Sleeping without a pillow and exercising in the open air are advised as being of benefit to the patient.

In comparing the above theory of cause of headache to the protein theory, it is apparent that the two theories differ greatly. The above dietetic treatment permits a great deal of protein to be included in the diet, while the protein theory permits only a low protein intake. These two theories differ decidedly from the carbohydrate theory.

Medical folks do not agree that any one type of diet is best to use for all cases of headache. This is due to the fact that headaches vary with individuals and the cause must be sought for each person and treated accordingly.

Food does have frequently a causal relation to headache and if foods are carefully selected, many headaches may be relieved; others permanently avoided.