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The Hygiene of Clothing

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The Hygiene of Clothing

By ALICE M. ROSENBERGER

WHAT are the points we consider when we make clothing purchases? Is it style, suitability, durability, becomingness, the hygienic qualities, or are the first four considered in their relation to the last? Too often we are governed by the style and becomingness of a garment, with suitability and durability following in close second place. In the end, hygienic conditions may be considered. Often we do not stop to estimate the amount of comfort, the increase in our efficiency and the effect upon our mental health obtained by wearing hygienic clothing. Clothing which does not conform to the laws of hygiene is constantly undermining the health of the individual by draining the body energy which should go to build up a resistance to disease, in general, and especially those of the throat and lungs.

In our consideration of hygienic clothing, we should first consider the needs of the body. In its ideal condition, the body should be maintained at a constant temperature of 98.6 degrees F., kept dry, clean, sufficiently ventilated and so unrestricted that all its parts can function properly. If we do not wear sufficient clothing, or the right kind, to keep the temperature normal, the body will tend to regulate the temperature by a chemical or physical change. This sort of regulation results when heat is increased by greater oxidation or the burning of fuel in the body. Variations in the quantity of blood sent to the skin, affecting the loss of heat by conduction, by connection and radiation, and the varying production of perspiration affecting the loss of heat by evaporation, are factors in the physical regulation of temperature. The term "physical regulation" implies that the body temperature is maintained without necessarily changing the rate of oxidation. Thus, in requiring excessive chemical or physical change in order to maintain a normal body temperature, there is an unnecessary loss of energy. This is common among those who wear too little underclothing in the winter, who stand in a draft or cool off too quickly after exercise, who wear chiffon hose on an extremely cold day.

We can help keep the body clean, dry and sufficiently ventilated by the proper selection of fabric for our garments. If we endeavor to maintain an ideal body condition, our choice of clothing should depend upon the fiber content, the weave, the weight, the finish and the cleansing qualities of the fabric. There have been many experiments carried on to determine the relative merits of the fibers, cotton, linen, silk and wool in moisture temperature and ventilation factors.

The results seem to vary according to the way in which the fibers are

woven. By experimentation, it has been found that a knitted fabric is to be preferred to a woven fabric, particularly for undergarments. By being knitted, a larger amount of air, which is a poor conductor of heat, is held in the meshes. This makes it warmer because the heat of the body is retained and the evaporation is more uniform. The comfort of a garment depends upon the amount of air it encloses and the amount of body heat it retains. This explains why a napped surface material is warmer than one with a smooth finish. Blankets of modern density are most effective for retaining heat when not exposed to air currents, but the heavy weight blankets are more effective in keeping out the wind.

Cotton and linen fibers are good conductors of heat and therefore will not protect the body from excessive loss of heat in the winter. However, when cotton is napped, to resemble wool, we find that this changes because of the increased amount of air it can hold. Silk and wool are poor conductors of heat and will prevent an excessive loss of heat from the body. Undergarments of these fibers should be worn by infants and children, by people underweight or with poor circulation, by old people and by men working out of doors in cold weather. On the other hand, a heavy woolen garment will prevent the penetration of excessive heat to the body, which explains why firemen wear woolen shirts all the year.

In regard to the cleansing qualities of the fibers, linen and cotton are preferred because they give up dirt quickly and can be boiled. Silk is easily laundered, but because it cannot stand real high temperature, it cannot be completely sterilized. Wool gives up dirt readily, but care must be taken in laundering as it shrinks and felts easily.

Our clothing must also take care of the wastes which our bodies give off. Since linen absorbs moisture readily, and also permits rapid evaporation, it is desirable for summer, but cools the body too readily in cold weather. Cotton absorbs moisture and holds it longer than linen. Silk absorbs moisture quickly and gives it up readily and is very desirable for undergarments. It is much warmer if closely woven, but is too expensive for most people. Rayon is being extensively used as a substitute for silk, since it launders easily, is cheaper and satisfactory in most respects. Wool absorbs moisture and also retains it. Although it becomes very damp, it does not feel cold in still air. In a draft of cold air, the heat conduction is rapid and the body receives a chill. However, if wool is not laundered properly, the air spores are closed and the respiratory function of the skin is interfered with by a

layer of moist air held between the skin and the garment. Present-day manufacturing processes have made it possible to bring some of the qualities of wool to other materials, such as fleeced cotton, canton flannel, etc.

In experiments carried on by the Bureau of Standards in comparing cotton and woolen blankets, there was found to be no significant difference in the heat resistance or in the resistance to passage of air or moisture. Cotton blankets are stiffer than woolen and are not as pliable and they absorb moisture more quickly.

The cut of a garment also determines its hygienic qualities. The design of a garment should be such as would permit easy cleaning and freedom of motion. It should not have any tight bands that would interfere with the circulation. A garment should be cut so the weight of it comes from the shoulder and is not tight in any place.

Besides choosing hygienic clothing, there are certain hygienic habits in relation to clothing that we should follow in caring for the general health. On cold winter or rainy days, it is quite essential that we wear heavier soled shoes, rubbers or galoshes. The foot comes in close contact with the cold paving if a thin soled shoe is worn and chills the body very much with the possible causing of colds in the head, disturbance of the bowels and inflammation of the pelvic organs. In addition to wearing galoshes on the cold wintry days, wool stockings help to protect the body from unnecessary chilling and consequently the lowering of one's resistance. The proper protection through under and outer garments is also essential. On rainy days the raincoat is a decided protection; however, it should be removed in the house as it does not allow for the necessary ventilation of the body and it causes excessive perspiration.

There are certain dangers which might arise from the use of some textiles. Diseases may be carried by

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Value of Rural Clubs

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project in the production of something, does not tell what value the information gained may be to that boy or girl later. Neither does it tell what the example set by the member may do for others, even if it is only the parents who use the methods afterward.

One measure of success is the increasing interest taken in it the past few years. Every farm bureau in Iowa is now conducting club work. More than 1,000 unpaid leaders give time to the work each year. In the United States about 600,000 are enrolled each year. In Iowa about 18,000 are entered in clubs annually. Plans are under way to greatly increase this number.

"Direct results from club work could be cited almost without end. In some cases they would show, as was done in one county, that the yields of corn of club members averaged just double the average yield of corn in the county. In livestock feeding, boys have shown that certain feeds produce cheaper gains than the more commonly used rations. In many localities the clubs have been responsible for bringing better types of animals to the communities, especially has purebred stock been spread in this way. There are hundreds of farms in Iowa today where the first purebred stock was put on them by club members. In canning clubs the girls have been taught cold pack canning by demonstrating this method and it is universally used in the United States. Thirty-five counties reported in December that 1485 girls had changed from wearing high heeled, pointed toed shoes to a low heeled, straight line shoe."

A survey taken in 1922 of some former clubs, showed that club members stay with the farm and practice what was taught them. In Henry County a sheep club was organized in 1916 with eight members. These eight members were looked up and it was found that seven of them were farming in the community and five had purebred herds of sheep. One had a flock of 143 head of purebred sheep. Out of a calf club of 15 members in Clinton County in 1916, 3 were in high school, 5 in college and 7 were farming. In every case where the parents of the members were asked if club work was worth while, the answer was emphatically in the affirmative.

From surveys, "one of the leading breeders of a Chester White swine herd in the country started with one gilt in 1913 in a pig club and he now frankly admits that it was club work that started him in the purebred hog business.

"In another Iowa county the methods of feeding cattle and the quality of livestock has been greatly improved the past few years due almost entirely, it is said by the breeders of that county, to the extensive club work done there.

"Several girls have become local leaders in their communities, later chairmen of the county girls' committee. One girl is at present not only holding an office in her own club, but is also secretary of the women's organization in her own township. Another girl is news reporter for the county farm bureau.

"But these results are often only secondary to the value the work has in developing boys and girls in other ways. Thru the clubs hundreds of young people are getting an experience and training in handling and making plans or programs, conducting meetings and in cooperating together which was not to be had by the average adult on the farm today. It is being noticed already that some of those active in farmers' organizations are former club members. In the future this development of leadership will be very noticeable."

Many receive an ambition to get more education. Over 200 former club members are now attending Iowa State College and many are probably in other schools. Socially, the club work has also developed many advantages and is providing that wholesome and satisfying social life needed in the rural communities. The club meetings and other events provide these features.

The two most outstanding benefits of club work are: the value to the individual and the value to the community. The individual always profits in more ways than one. More often it is the development of interest in the farm and the home and the education received which will be of future use, that will be the valuable results. Often there is a financial gain, as is the case where a product is produced and sold.

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clothing made under sweat shop conditions. Poorly dyed stockings may poison the skin, especially if it is broken or scratched.

The value of a study of the hygiene of clothing lies in the ability to recognize the factors which make for hygienic dress and to choose healthful clothing and to form correct health habits. Our clothing should be chosen to suit the needs of the individual. It must be suited to the age, occupation and season. Men's clothing is just as unhygienic as women's, especially in its adjustment to heat regulation and ventilation. There is need of more investigation and scientific work done on the relation of clothing to health, study of elimination of bacteria by laundry and dry cleaning, and the physical properties of fibers when combined in different weaves and in union of different fibers.

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