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Margaret House Irwin

Iowa State College

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“It’s Vitamized . . .”

By Margaret House Irwin

Former Research Assistant, F. and N.

VITAMINS—those tricky little uncertainties—have managed, during the last 10 years, to upset more conscientious housewives than any of us care to remember. Therefore, it seems only fair that vitamins should be made to line up their ever-increasing dietetic alphabet and fully explain themselves to those of us who are not quite sure what the big to-do concerning tomato juice and vegetable cooking water is all about.

“Vita” is the Latin word meaning life. When scientists at Yale University and the University of Wisconsin made the simultaneous discovery that rats would not grow on a diet wherein the only sources of fat were lard or vegetable oils, and that they immediately regained health upon the addition of butterfat or egg-yolk to the diet, the scientists started the vitamin ball rolling. This formerly unheard-of organic complex which must be eaten to promote growth, they called vitamin A.

Vitamin A is present in butterfat, cod-liver oil, yellow corn, sweet potatoes, carrots, egg yolks and leafy green vegetables. It should be served in generous portions in every day’s dietary, where it is usually well taken care of if the family has a natural fondness for butter and salads.

If we deprive ourselves of health-giving foods, we will first exhaust the body supply of vitamin A, then we will cease growing, lose weight, and be attacked by ophthalmia, a characteristic eye disease in which the fluids of the eyelid dry up, infection sets in and blindness results.

Just as food chemists had gotten vitamin A nicely settled, vitamin B broke upon the scientific horizon. This factor is to be found in most natural food, unpolished rice, whole grain cereals, fruits and vegetables. It is the important constituent in yeast which is lauded so high-

ly by its advertisers. In its absence, the disease of beriberi, causing as it does loss of appetite, digestive disturbances and in extreme cases, paralysis and death, attacks man.

Recent work on vitamin B has proved that this vitamin is not a unit but a combination of two or more factors. One of these factors promotes growth and the other the nervous symptoms of beriberi. The growth-promoting factor is now called “vitamin G” and the aneuritic factor is termed “vitamin B.”

Scurvy, the disease that we now attribute to a lack of vitamin C in the diet, is an old, old disease, especially prevalent among soldiers, sailors and explorers who subsisted for long periods of time without fresh foods. We seldom see severe cases of scurvy in this country, but many cases of latent scurvy are known. These are characterized by dullness, congestion of the alimentary tract, and pains resembling rheumatism in the joints.

Vitamin C is so readily destroyed by heat that a partial deficiency of this vitamin often occurs unless an especial effort is made to eat raw fruits and vegetables. Citrus fruits, lettuce, cabbage, apples, and carrots are excellent sources of vitamin C and are especially valuable in that they can be eaten raw. Tomatoes either cooked or raw are rich in this vitamin, for their acidity seems to protect vitamin C from destruction by heat. Canned tomato juice is therefore especially valuable as a substitute for orange juice when the price of oranges prohibits their use. Acids prevent and bases promote the destruction of vitamin C, which is argument enough for not cooking vegetables with soda.

“D” is man’s substitute for sunshine. Rickets, the disease resulting from a lack of vitamin D, is very common among the children of our great cities. Its most characteristic symptom is bone deformities caused by the failure of the bones to ossify. Bones ossify from the head of the bone downward and from the shaft of the bone upward. At the place where these parts of the bone meet, there is a cartilaginous line known as the epiphysis. It is at this point that the bone swells during rickets. Swollen wrists and knee joints are typical symptoms. The rib junctions also swell, giving rise to beaded ribs or the so-called “rachitic rosary.” Other deformations of the bones which often persist throughout life, are contracted pelvis, pigeon breasts and bowed legs. Abdomins of children suffering from rickets protrude and the children are described as pot-bellied.

Not long after the identification of vitamin D, investigators were puzzled by the discovery that the beneficial effects (Continued on page 13)
Former Dean Dies

Mrs. Marian H. Kilbourne, dean of women at Iowa State College from 1900 to 1909, died at her home in San Diego, Calif., on Oct. 7. For six years before coming to Iowa State Mrs. Kilbourne occupied a similar position at Coe College. She taught for 21 years in various schools throughout the state, and while here conducted classes in history of art in the Home Economics Division. At the time of her death Mrs. Kilbourne was 84 years old.

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(Continued from page 1) of feeding vitamin D could also be wrought by sunshine. A little later Steenbock discovered that vitamin D could be put into certain foods by exposing them to ultraviolet light. Certain fat-like substances called cholesterol and ergosterol become highly potent in vitamin D when irradiated. Chemical analyses of the tissues of the body show that large amounts of these substances are found just under the outer layers of the skin. Evidently Nature planned that the sun's rays should penetrate the skin, activate these constituents, and thus supply man with an abundance of vitamin D. But man has developed a mode of life with which Nature did not reckon. He has built cities covered with smoke screens and has arranged to spend a large portion of his day indoors. Since man spurns the natural source of vitamin D, he must provide it artificially. The foods richest in this vitamin are cod liver oil, butter fat, and egg yolk. However, the amount of vitamin D to be found in these last two foods depends upon the amount of time the cows and chickens spend in the sunshine.

VITAMIN E, the last member of this sextet, is of vital importance to every normal woman. Tho this vitamin has been only recently discovered, it is now generally conceded that it is the factor which prevents sterility in women. In experiments on female rats, a highly purified diet containing vitamins A, B, C, D, and G was fed. The animals conceived naturally, but about the twelfth day after conception, foetal death occurred, with the subsequent resorption of the unborn young. Vitamin E acts as an anti-sterility agent to the human as well as to the rodent.

Lettuce, meat, whole wheat, wheat germ, yellow corn, egg yolk and many other foods are generously supplied with vitamin E. Vitamins are life-givers. Let us plan our menus and select our bills of fare so that none of these mysterious parcels of health will evade us.