

Foods Containing Vitamin B

(Written for "The Listener" by DR. MURIEL BELL, Nutritionist to the Department of Health)

WHEN the first studies on foods and vitamins were made, the unknown water-soluble fraction which was associated with the cure of beriberi was called vitamin B. It was not long before it was found that there were several different components in the "vitamin B complex" as it came to be termed; in fact there have been jocular references to the "whole B family of vitamins." There have been nine or more of these differentiated already—it sounds almost like a litter! The one which is mainly responsible for preventing beriberi (a disease that has been humorously alluded to as being "very, very bad for the nerves!") is vitamin B1 or thiamin or aneurin. The remainder was first of all called the vitamin B2 complex — and then that became a veritable family, too. Now we become confused unless we follow the names that the chemists have given them. So, in addition to thiamin, we have

- (1) riboflavin (which prevents ariboflavinosis!—that's a nasty one, isn't it? but the doctors have always had a reason for asking you to put out your tongue. Now they have some additional reasons, arising out of the appearance of the tongue in vitamin B-complex deficiencies).
- (2) nicotinic acid (which prevents pellagra, a disease of the three D's—dementia, diarrhoea, and dermatitis—meaning that the mind, the intestine, and the skin are frequently all out of order in this disease. So is the tongue).
- (3) Choline—which has a lot to do with preventing the accumulation of fat in the liver.
- (4) pantothenic acid.
- (5) para-amino-benzoic acid (P.A.B. for short).
- (6) pyridoxin.
- (7) biotin.
- (8) inositol.
- (9) folic acid.

It is still too early to say much about these more recently discovered components at the end of the list. They are of great interest to those who study rats, mice, chickens, foxes, monkeys, and yeast, but we await further studies before we know whether pantothenic acid and para-amino benzoic acid prevent the greying of hair in humans as they do in rats. We know, however, that "P.A.B." has a part to play in the protective nature of the white cells of the blood.

Moreover, there is not as much difference as we might imagine between the things needed for the life of a yeast cell and those needed for the cells of human beings.

What is of great interest to us is that formerly many thousands used to die of beriberi or of pellagra in different parts of the world, and now these diseases are disappearing.

In the articles that follow, the foods that contribute thiamin, riboflavin, and nicotinic acid will be given. It is important to know which of these we are going to lose if meat rationing comes in, so that we may be able to make the necessary adjustments.

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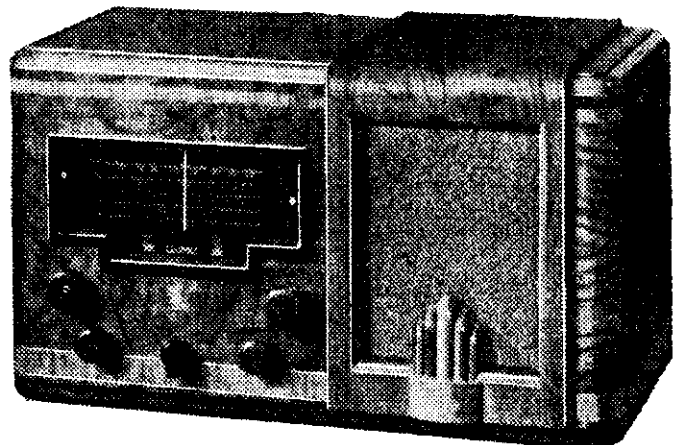
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