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## NUTRITIONAL DEBTS

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

WHEN you sprint for a tram, you continue to puff for the first two blocks or so of the journey. Physiologists express this as "going into oxygen debt" and then working off the debt. In other words, we are able to use the substances already present in our muscles as fuel for muscular work, but they have been utilised under "anaerobic" conditions, and substances have accumulated which have to be oxidised away during the next half-hour or so.

We might compare this with the state of affairs that exists in our muscles when they use, as they prefer to do, carbohydrates for providing them with energy. Vitamin B factors are needed for enabling them to unlock this energy. When we take sugar, we are consuming a pure carbohydrate which has nothing to contribute but calories (heat units), and which at the same time puts demands upon our supply of vitamin B factors. Sugar thus causes a debit balance as far as the supply of vitamin B in the tissues is concerned.

For some time it has been known that a diet with a high proportion of sugar or refined cereals is the type of diet that will accelerate the onset of beri-beri. Thus diets in Eastern countries, where the economic factor demands a high proportion of carbohydrate because it is cheaper, will be conducive to the development of beri-beri, even though they may have the same quantity of vitamin B as is present in a British dietary. Their polished rice puts them into nutritional debt, and as they are unable to pay it off by borrowing some vitamin B from meat or milk, they will in time develop beri-beri.

On this basis, foods have been classified roughly into vitamin B assets and liabilities. The assets contribute something over and above their requirements for vitamin B; they include legumes, oatmeal and wheatmeal, beef, mutton and milk. On the balance point are potatoes and wheat-germ bread. The liabilities, in descending scale of their value in this respect, are: white bread and flour, ready-to-eat breakfast foods, sago, tapioca, sweet biscuits, honey, jam, confectionery, beer and sugar.

Even if our nutritional debts are not great enough to cause beri-beri (present in this country very infrequently, and then usually in toppers!) they may make all the difference to our general health. Unpaid debts of this kind result first of all in psychological changes—irritability, inefficiency, depression or neurasthenia. These minor degrees of deficiency are hard to detect; there is very little that the doctor can find on physical examination. As one doctor expressed it to me, "they are just not right; but advise them to eat the proper foods, and they become right again."

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