

ABOUT TURN

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

IN Britain, the expectant and nursing mother is given the following allowances: Of milk, in addition to the civilian ration (which amounts to about 2 pints per week), she gets 7 pints a week. Dried skim milk powder is available at intervals, one small tin at each allocation.

Meat—one and a half times the civilian ration.

Eggs—two shell eggs and three packets of dried egg at each allocation.

She gets the ordinary 2 ozs. of butter, 4 ozs. of margarine, and 1oz. of cooking fat per week, and ordinary rations of cheese and bacon.

A special allowance of concentrated orange juice permits her 1 tablespoonful per day, and the six-ounce bottle of cod liver oil every six weeks is enough to allow her one teaspoonful per day.

Limited though this sounds to us, it serves to emphasise the modern attitude to the requirements of the expectant and nursing mother. The extra milk and the extra meat and extra eggs provide her with the additional protein that is needed during this time.

There may be many who think that this is contrary to the advice that they have been given in the past. Too often the only injunction given to the expectant mother has been "just go on with your ordinary diet," or "Don't eat too much meat," without any enquiry being made into what is their ordinary diet, or what constitutes their ordinary meat intake.

There have been two fallacious beliefs that have given rise to erroneous ideas as to what amount of protein, especially meat protein, should be taken at this period. One error was the belief that a certain condition called eclampsia, which sometimes occurs in pregnancy, was allied to kidney disease, and that kidney disease must be treated by a low protein intake. The other error arose through the observations made during World War 1, observations from which false deductions were unfortunately derived. During the 1914-1918 war, the total incidence of eclampsia in those continental countries affected by the food blockade was diminished. It was loosely argued that this was due to the shortage of meat protein. An era began in which the advice given was to reduce the meat intake during pregnancy. Later, however, the figures were re-examined, and it was found that the lowered incidence of eclampsia was to be ascribed to the circumstance that many young husbands were called up into the armies, and that therefore there were fewer first pregnancies. In those first pregnancies that did occur, the incidence of eclampsia was the same. It is known that eclampsia is more prone to occur in first pregnancies. This illustrates how easily it is for fallacious ideas to arise if correlations are made on infirm statistical foundations.

Unfortunately, the idea spread among women that if their feet began to show signs of swelling, they should immediately cut down their meat and protein intake. This continues to happen to-day,

as ante-natal clinics can testify. Women should seek expert advice at the ante-natal clinics rather than make this change on their own initiative. Pamphlets are available giving a schedule of foods that are advised for the expectant and nursing mother. We have also embodied dietary advice in this column on previous occasions, for example, in "Storkie and Co." published in *The Listener* for April 13, 1945 (No. 226 in this series).

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