

FOR AND AGAINST COOKING

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

THERE are certain advantages in eating some of our foods in the raw state; other foods are better eaten cooked.

In favour of eating some foods raw, we find that raw vegetables and fruits are better for the teeth; not so much sugar is used if fruit is eaten raw, and the inclusion of too much sugar upsets the balance of the diet; for sugar provides us only with calories—it contributes no vitamins nor minerals, and nowadays we are aware that we should not have too many calories in proportion to the vitamin content of the foods we eat. Also, as far as the teeth are concerned, it is of great value, so the dentists tell us, to give the teeth some work to do; the teeth of tiny children will become better spaced, allowing more room for the second set of teeth to come in, if the jaw is exercised. Raw vegetables and fruits have, moreover, a cleansing action on the teeth of young and old alike.

Another advantage of raw vegetables lies in the fact that much of our cooking is badly done, leading to losses of vitamins and minerals. For example, about 50 % of the vitamin C of vegetables and fruits is soaked out into the cooking water, and in the case of the former foodstuff is too often thrown down the sink. If the cooking is prolonged, there is a further loss of the vitamin by destruction. We lose vitamin B and C and iron and other nutrients if we are careless about our cooking methods.

Another Side of the Picture

But there is another side of the picture, too. There are the well-known merits of cooking starches—they are more easily attacked by the digestive juices when the envelopes of cellulose round the starch grains are burst by heat.

There is the value of destroying harmful bacteria by cooking. However, not all bacteria are harmful—some of them are our friends: for example the bacteria that cause milk to sour. In many lands, sour milk and butter milk are extensively used, with benefit to those who use them.

Add to this the important function that cooking has of developing flavours which stimulate the digestive juices.

In addition to these better-known advantages of cooking there is the less well-known effect of making proteins more digestible. How many lay persons, and how many doctors and nurses are still under the erroneous impression that raw egg is more digestible than cooked egg! If one continues to feed rats on raw egg white, they become ill and die. Human beings have not yet been tested to this extreme, but in studies on human beings, it is now fully proved that cooked egg white is better digested than raw egg white. Another example is in the protein of the soya bean; it is much

better assimilated if the bean or the flour made from the bean is cooked.

Sometimes we find that a person cannot tolerate a foodstuff until it is cooked; some people are apt to be sensitive to various foodstuffs; for example, some children cannot take eggs—they are more likely to tolerate them if they are

well cooked. But this introduces the subject of the sensitiveness that certain people have towards particular foods—we call it "food allergy"; we must deal with it in a separate article.

There is this fact to add—that, if the food contains all the necessary essentials, children grow better if their meals are warm. On the other hand, they will grow better on a cold meal like the "Oslo Breakfast" if that cold meal (of salad, fruit, cheese, wholemeal bread, milk) makes up for deficiencies in the home diet.

(Next week: "Burns," by Dr. Turbott)

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