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Advice on Health (No. 100)

## GERIATRICS

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



PERHAPS this heading sounds like a suitable word for a radio "quiz" section; the prize will go to the person who defines it as "that department of medicine which deals with the care of the elderly." As one doctor has put it, the care is directed towards "putting more life into the years, rather than more years into life."

This study of the later years of life has come into prominence because of the increased average expectation of life in the community, an increase which bears testimony to the effectiveness of many new remedies introduced by medical science. It is very worthwhile to study this period of life, for as one authority has put it, "age conceals a vast reservoir of talent, skill, wisdom and experience, not to mention much muscle and brawn if proper food maintains reserves." The aims of geriatrics will include the prevention of rheumatic diseases, degeneration of the arteries, obesity, and diabetes, and the rarefaction of the bones that lead to the fractures of old age.

One authority, writing in the Journal of the American Medical Association, says that "the tea-and-toast schedule for grandma is outmoded;" he also quotes, apropos of woman's fate, that "they either become skeletons or feather pillows." In the study of the ageing process, it is found to be desirable that they should become neither skeletons nor feather pillows, but maintain a happy medium. In the study of longevity in rats, it has been found that groups of rats prevented from becoming excessively fat either by means of exercise or by the restriction of calories, were consistently the long-lived group. For humans who have a tendency to obesity, vegetables and fruits should act as the "fillers."

There is an erroneous belief that food in general should be severely restricted in old age. A sufficiency of the protein foods is still an essential in this period. It is only the occasional patient with gout or with certain forms of kidney disease who has to be careful about the protein intake. However, as life becomes more sedentary, and weight begins to rise, be careful of the carbohydrate; as great an amount as possible should be in the form of wholemeal (though they might be better without the bran). Potato is the next best form of starch.

From middle life onwards, avoid too much fat, particularly if you come from a family that runs to diseases of the arteries, strokes, sudden death by heart disease, or gallstones. But it is important that what fat you do take should contain the fat soluble vitamins; thus you should see that you take capsules or drops which contain vitamins A and D. Prevent fractures by taking cheese, skim milk, and green vegetables for their calcium content. See to your vitamins C and B.