

Trouble in the Joints

JOINT troubles, and the rheumatic diseases bring more pain to more people than any other chronic disease. We suffer greatly from these in New Zealand. We can hardly take comfort from knowing that the whole world so suffers. In U.S.A. more than 10 million have "arthritis" or "rheumatism," of whom more than one million are permanently disabled. Denmark pays some nine million pounds annually for treatments, loss of earnings, and disablement benefits. Sweden has 80,000 to 100,000 people incapacitated each day. Two of the culprits are rheumatoid arthritis and osteo-arthritis. Rheumatoid arthritis is the cruellest of the whole family of rheumatic afflictions. It is a chronic disease that often lasts a lifetime, that is of unknown cause, and that proves very difficult to stop or cure.

Any age can be attacked, but rheumatoid arthritis favours beginning between the ages 18 and 45. The usual story is one of pain in fingers or toes, followed by stiffness or swelling of the joints. From fingers it may move to wrists and shoulders, from toes to knees. Slowly, insidiously, other joints are attacked. The whole body is affected, although attention is rather fixed on the pain and stiffness in joints. You really must take it seriously if you have a joint that bothers you in this way, if it is coupled with this kind of upset—appetite failing, sleeping poorly, feeling unduly tired, sweating, looking pale, and losing a bit of weight.

Now don't get mixed up with that other crippler, osteo-arthritis. A joint-troubler, too! In time most of us get a touch of this, after 50 years of age. A few progress to real bother, but this disease sticks to the joints, usually the big weight-bearing ones. It doesn't upset the body generally. If, then, you have a hip or knee that's stiffening and painful, but otherwise you're O.K.—weight keeping up, appetite and sleep reasonable, colour good—you are in trouble,

but in historic company. Dinosaurs had this osteo-arthritis over 200 million years ago, Egyptian mummies, and pre-historic American Indians, too! An X-ray picture clinches the diagnosis, and the doctor will advise how to avoid strain and weight bearing, and so minimise crippling.

With rheumatoid-arthritis, it's a different story. This is a general disease affecting the whole body, not only your joints. Until this general disease burns itself out, as it does in time, resting the whole body helps. Splints may have to be worn so that joints do not get into wrong positions while the disease is active. Without this precaution, cruel crippling can occur. The inflamed joints are forced to rest in the best position. There's less disease activity at rest, and joints are often freer and less stiff, although splinted. When the inflammation is over, the muscles have to be toned up with exercises. All the while, weight must be kept up or the loss stopped and regained. Protein foods—meat, fish, eggs, milk and cheese—and fruit—freely help in the fight, and the diet should feature these.

The paleness or anaemia that comes with this disease may need iron and blood transfusions at times. What destroys the red blood cells is unknown. Radio-isotope studies in U.S.A. are tagging the red cells to try and reveal the mechanism of damage, and so point the way to effective treatment. Cortisone and ACTH have been overboomed in treatment. They suppress the activity in some cases, but do not cure the disease. For a while there's a sense of well-being, but this goes if the drugs are stopped. In certain picked cases, cortisone is very useful. But the body can't stand too much of this drug. Side effects develop. Picking those cases that will benefit is a rheumatism specialist's job.

I've tried to show how serious is the disease, rheumatoid-arthritis. Early treatment gives best hope of arrest and of avoiding crippling. Be suspicious,

Minor Miseries

WHAT are the things that take the edge off your enjoyment of life? That's a question all of us could answer at some length if given half a chance, and there was no lack of willing masochists when the NZBS decided not long ago to get half a dozen people to re-live their everyday sufferings over the air. Of course, it was an understood thing that the speakers mustn't take themselves too seriously, and listeners will find they are amused rather than made miserable when *Here's My Discomfort* is broadcast in the 2.0 p.m. *Mainly for Women* session from 3YA during the next few weeks—the first broadcast on August 11. Besides, there will be the pleasure of discovering that someone else shares that suffering you thought you had all to yourself. The minor irritations of life can be either physical or mental, as Joan Stevens, Lecturer in English at Victoria University College, points out in the talk which opens the series, and first on her list of bodily discomforts is a rubberised raincoat on a sunny day. Second only to that are the theatre pests, and by the time Miss Stevens has finished telling us the many



ways in which they can be annoying she's really in full cry. Owen Jensen, musician and critic, follows Miss Stevens, and says a good deal about musical discomfort. Among the pet aversions discussed in other talks are cats (Judith Terry), and dogs—or at least the "principle" of dogs (R. A. Copland); and J. D. McDonald and Fred Jones, each with a title to defend, argue their claims to be, respectively, "the most discomforted person" and "the most irritable man" in the world.

This is the text of a talk on health broadcast recently from ZB, YA and YZ stations of the NZBS by DR. H. B. TURBOTT, Deputy - Director-General of Health

then, should you develop a joint stiff, sore and swollen, that is coupled with being generally below par—energy, appetite, sleeping, and weight affected! Take your suspicions to your doctor. If he confirms them, ask him to refer you to a colleague who specialises or is particularly interested in rheumatic disorders. There is a hospital, the Queen Elizabeth Hospital at Rotorua, especially for rheumatic diseases. A great deal can be done—but only if you act at the first stiffness and swelling.

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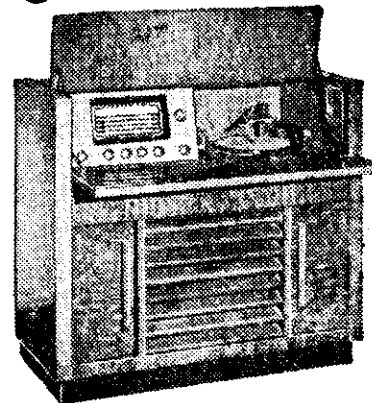
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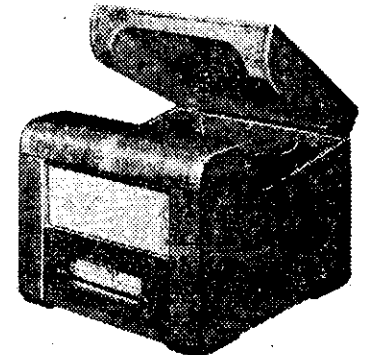


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