

ABOUT ALLERGY

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



EITHER in your own family or among your friends and acquaintances there will be someone suffering from an allergy. An allergy can develop towards anything around us. Most people remain insensitive, and are not bothered with asthma, hay fever, hives—called also by a longer name, urticaria—some eczemas, a type of headache known as migraine, and some forms of blood vessel disturbances. Other people are so keyed up to some particular thing that meeting it or eating it their sensitiveness shows up in one or other of the troubles mentioned. It may be dust, foods, pollens, feathers or almost anything commonly around us.

Why do some people become sensitised, or allergic, to such harmless things? Nobody knows! Allergy seems to run in families. Not the trigger sensitivity to a special thing, but the tendency to become sensitised to things that are harmless to other folk. A father with hay fever may have children developing eczema or asthma. Whatever it may be, breathed in, handled, or eaten, if body cells are sensitive to it, they release histamine into the blood. This histamine may in one person upset the eyes or nose as hay fever, in another constrict the bronchial tubes and bring on asthma, or cause a gastric upset, or an attack of hives. The mechanism is the same in all cases. This histamine causes the muscle spasm in lung or intestines and the welling of fluid from eyes and nose or into the skin to make weals.

In the medical world things that people react to with increased sensitivity are called allergens. They can be anything eaten. You probably know somebody who can't eat rhubarb or oysters or strawberries without developing a rash or being sick. These unfortunate people are allergic to these foods. It can be any food—milk, eggs, wheat flour—or any medicine or drug. You will know somebody who has suffered severe rashes after some antibiotic or sulphonamide drug, or possibly been gastrically upset after aspirin. These are allergies. Other allergies can develop from things breathed in,

such as house dust, feather or hair or fur emanations, moulds and pollens. Further allergies can develop through the skin. Have you been gardening, been scratched, and developed an itchy hive-like rash? You were allergic to whatever scratched you. Stroking or handling a cat, dog, or horse, may be responsible in some folk. In a great many allergies, besides the specific cause, there has to be a kind of body trigger-happy state before an attack occurs, caused by worry and anxiety, or some stress. You may have a friend who develops migraine when worried or overworking, but keeps free from his headaches in the absence of stress and strain.

People are usually unaware of the cause of their allergy. If they do know, it may be possible to avoid the allergen. For example, not eating strawberries, getting rid of a feather pillow. Avoidance is not usually easy. If the cause is unknown, skin tests may show, through a slight swelling and redness, which substance or combination of substances is the trouble. Elimination diets are another way of finding the cause, leaving out one food after another till the culprit is found. Either way—skin tests or elimination dieting—patience is needed and perseverance by both doctor and patient. However, it is always worth trying, for, if the allergen is discovered, a course of desensitisation can be tried.

This is simply teaching the body cells to be more resistant to the offender. If a person has injections of the specific cause, in tiny dosage, but increasing every few days, the body learns to tolerate large doses without suffering allergic attacks. This desensitisation lasts a couple of years normally, and can be renewed by booster doses.

In an actual attack of allergy, doctors use adrenalin or various antihistamine drugs in an attempt to neutralise the histamine liberated into the blood. But you don't want to be perpetually suffering your allergy! If you haven't done so do find that allergen yourself, ask your doctor to give you skin tests or elimination diets. If successful, let him desensitise you—it doesn't work in all allergies, but is very effective with some, and should be given a go.

APPLES

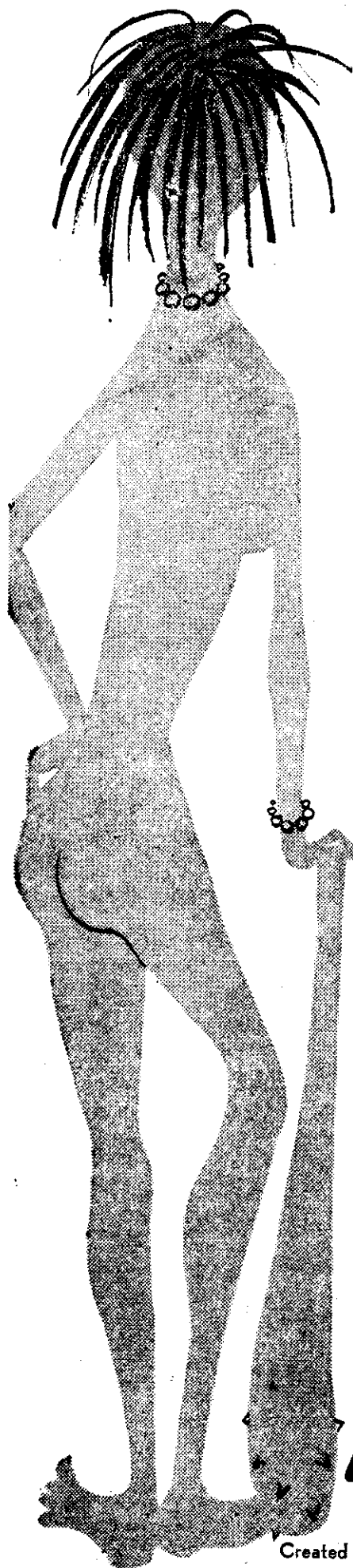
*I KNOW a tree where apples grow
With grasses flourishing below;
And bees hang heavy on the air
And quiet growth engenders there.*

*Sauntering before late lunch,
Treading good orchard ground I munch
The inviting apples hanging low
To hands incurious to know
Eve's fatal fall (and all her wariness)
—And toss my applecores with airiness.*

*(Newton passing before my eye
Notes, with gravity where windfalls lie.)*

*Back in the house I praise the tree
Whose little apples comfort me:
My host, aghast, cries "Oh good Lord,
They should go through the Apple Board!"*

—Denis Glover



*Time was
when
Smart women
wore
nothing...*

*In 1955
Smart women
in this
country
will wear
nothing but
Le Bijou
costume
jewellery.*

le bijou

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