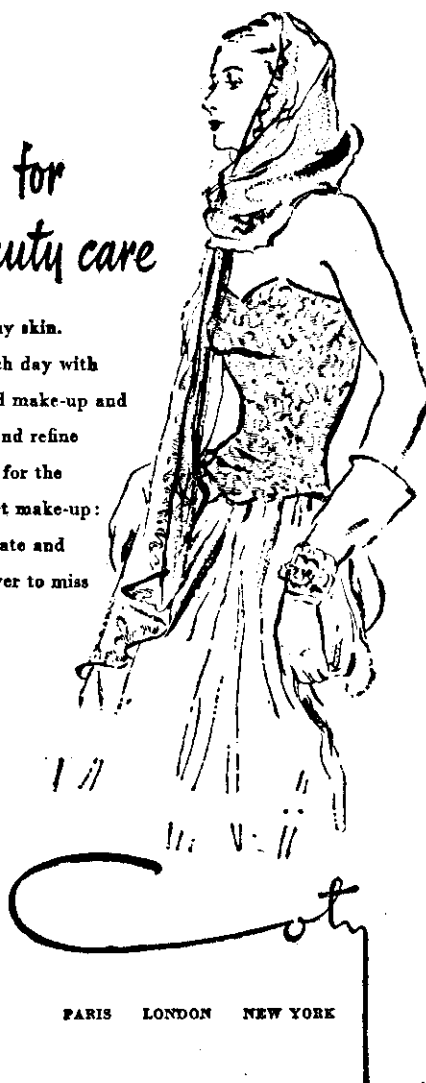
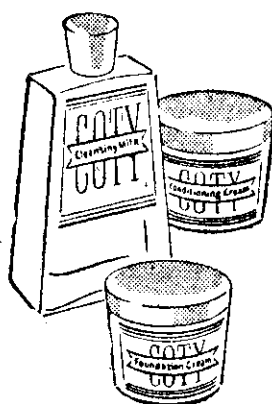


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Problems of Old Age

(continued from previous page)

they don't seem to need as much sleep as they used to?

Answer: Yes, I still think they should have an afternoon nap if they want it. Old people often sleep better in the afternoon than in the night. Often they wake up in the early morning hours because vitality is then at its lowest—after a few hours of sleep they have difficulty in getting to sleep again. The healthiest people, old or young, are often those who can snatch a few hours of sleep whenever they need it or have the opportunity to get it. So let the old people, whom I see you are still determined to organise, have their afternoon nap if they want it and can take it.

Question: About clothing. We were told recently that in China the old people wore long padded silk robes. That sounded very sensible to me. Do you think our clothing is well planned for older people? Is warmth a big problem?

Answer: Yes, that's a very good idea about a padded silk robe. The Chinese have a great deal of practical wisdom behind their age-long usages. Ageing people are more like children in their need for warmth. It is said that a warm coat is as good as a meal to a child on a chilly day. The same is true of age. Particularly true is this during the night, especially in these cold grey hours of the early morning when so many older people wake up and can't get to sleep again. Hot bottles and hot drinks and a little stimulant of some kind are the great comforters.

Again this is natural and not to be anticipated in any way. When the ageing person feels the need for extra warmth it is natural to do something about it; this should be understood.

No, I don't think we do anything very helpful about clothing for old people. I remember my grandmother's fine and beautiful shetland shawl which seemed to give her great comfort on many occasions. But again I warn you: "Don't go round giving shetland shawls to the people you think have qualified for them. The time for a Granny's shawl is the time when the Granny herself wants it—and there are some grannies at 40 and some young people at seventy. So don't go planning and organising for an age that is so variable.

Question: There are old people who seem determined to be grumpy, discontented and critical. Does some physical change cause this?

Answer: Sometimes there may be a physical change behind some of the behaviour difficulties. The hardening of the arteries which is inevitable as life goes on makes it harder for people so affected to keep interested in the everyday things that are taking up the attention of those around them. It is easier to live in the past, and there is a tendency to be critical and compare unfavourably the interests of the present with the recollected enjoyments of the past. The mind tends to run along the well-beaten grooves; the old stories are repeated in the same words—it is easier to run in the old groove than to beat out a new road of thought and find fresh modes of expression when the vital blood-flow to the brain is not as good as it used to be. So be patient with your really old people and remember that their stories

may be worth listening to even if you have heard them before.

About the "grumpy and discontented" bit: I feel inclined to take up the cudgels for the old people and say that there are just as many grumpy and discontented young people as there are old. This is a disease of all ages; and it is due to failure to develop and mature in the way of life that is appropriate to the age of the person. There are grumpy and discontented babies; and there are grumpy and discontented young people. The babies don't want to grow up; and the young people don't want to grow older; and the men and women of adult years don't want to accept the responsibilities that are appropriate to their years, and when these ill-adjusted people reach old age they don't want to be old and they can't face the fact that their race is nearly run, and so they remain as they have always been—grumpy and discontented. No, I won't have you blame old age for that.

Question: Your whole belief seems to be that age should come naturally and happily. We know that it does not always do this. Could you give us some guide to achieving this contentment?

Answer: Contented ageing is largely dependent on recognition of the needs of the body when it becomes less resilient, less equal to strenuous activity, requiring less food always of the best quality, needing more warmth—a recognition of these limitations as they become gradually, very gradually apparent, and by recognising them and catering for them in a natural way to enable the essential person who does not age to continue in all the activities that are congenial and comforting, and in others that have had to be denied through the stress of the mature earlier years. Often the things that belong more to the mind and spirit of the person have had to be laid aside, not indulged in. To these, a healthy old age comes as a benediction and a blessing. Time to read—time to garden (within the limits of physical capacity), time to develop the hidden skills that were crowded out in the active years of money-making and family cares. I have known several grandmothers who became good artists in their seventies and eighties. And how many grandmothers really enjoy their grandchildren more than they ever enjoyed their own children! They have more leisure and less responsibility—or at least they should in a well ordered society.

And they should of course all have grandchildren to enjoy. One of the really bitter things about old age is loneliness. The lonely aged person has need to be a philosopher. Having no intimate friends left who understood something of their earlier life, they often have to accept the fact that youth can never understand age. After all, this again is natural. The old person has been young, but the youth has not known old age. It is no good saying, "You will think differently when you are older." That only infuriates youth, true as it undoubtedly is very often. Age should be able to make allowances for youth more easily than youth can understand old age. What the young cannot possibly understand is that the old person does not feel old. There is nothing old in the psyche.



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