

FOOD FIT FOR INVALIDS.

BY A FAMILY DOCTOR.



IT is a matter very much to be lamented that, although nearly every head of a family knows something about the nature and uses of the more common and less dangerous medicines, and perhaps even possesses a medicine chest, there should be so little general knowledge about the proper system of dieting the sick and convalescent.

There is also, I am sorry to say, more or less of a prevailing ignorance as regards the food necessary to support life—healthful, happy life—in infants. Almost

every mother feeds in her own particular way, on a plan probably handed down to her by tradition. If this were otherwise, and if the subject were better understood, there would be fewer bandy-legged and rickety children in this country, fewer pale, flabby faces, and fewer cases of consumption and chest complaint. Of this I feel certain.

As regards invalids: in very few of even the largest and best houses, so far as my knowledge goes, is such a thing thought of as setting apart one room in the house as a sick-room. Such a room as this, I need hardly suggest, ought to be in the quietest part of the house, and well aloft. It ought to be large, well and scientifically ventilated, with as cheerful an outlook as possible, and with as much furniture as necessary, and no more.

No; this is seldom considered, and so, when some dear one is laid low, he or she is placed in an ordinary bed-room, so filled with furniture, so adorned with drapery and curtains, as to reduce the patient's chances of recovery to a minimum.

Again, when some one falls sick, the doctor is always appealed to as to what the food should be. The doctor is, to be sure, the best judge, but every one ought to know a little about invalid dieting.

Now, broadly speaking, we divide food for invalids into low diet, middle diet, and full diet.

Low Diet.—This consists of the nutritious teas, such as beef tea, mutton tea, or chicken tea—all of which possess much the same nutritive value; but change is pleasant and wholesome—broth, barley water, and thirst-allaying drinks.

Middle Diet.—For this we add puddings, eggs, and perhaps biscuits, bread, or toast to the low diet.

Full Diet.—By this the physician means a fair and digestible allowance of solid and nutritious food, the plainer the better; chops and steaks, underdone, and not fat; chicken, game, boiled white fish—not the oleaginous sort, such as salmon—eggs, bread, puddings, potatoes (well mashed and in great moderation), but only the lightest of vegetables, such as marrows or cauliflower.

Now, in many cases correct dieting is of life or death importance, and the doctor's orders are, in this respect, to be most strictly obeyed. In some fevers, for example, a patient will indulge in queer whims and fancies as regards food.

"Just a little of this, or a little of that, nursie."

But "nursie" must be firm, and the most she can do for her patient is to report the matter to the doctor, and ask if such-and-such an article, which the invalid has craved for, will do him good.

I might give a hundred instances in proof of what I advance: namely, that a patient will often long for the very article of diet which is least of all beneficial to him. Vegetables, for instance, might positively prove fatal in a case of dysentery or in the convalescent stage of typhoid fever.

The quantity of the food given to the invalid, its quality and its culinary preparation, are all to be considered by the careful nurse. I can afford but little space for describing the cooking of invalid food—there are, I believe, useful pamphlets that describe all this—I can but give a hint or two about the value of certain articles. Now, I have over and over again said there was a right way and a wrong way of making beef tea. My readers ought by this time to know the right way. The wrong way is to let it come to the boil; by so doing we harden the albumen instead of coaxing it out, and permitting it to mingle with the water by gentle simmering. There is a "beef tea extractor," which obviates the danger of its being wrongfully prepared, but I cannot at present recall the name of the inventor, though, I suppose, at most chemists' or druggists' shops the information could be obtained.

As to the strength beef tea should be: a pound of nice rump steak should make a quart. I think it is both better and cheaper to make it from steak rather than from skinny stuff from near the shanks.

The longer beef tea is simmered the stronger and better will it be; two to three hours is the minimum, six hours would be none too long. A little nice toast eaten with it increases its nutritive properties, or it may be thickened with arrowroot or some of the so-called "patent foods" of the shops.

Give beef tea little and often, but this will depend on the state of the patient. Say, as a minimum, about two ounces every two hours, or an ounce of thickened beef tea every hour if the stomach can bear it, and if it produces only comfort, without either restlessness following or increase of fever.

Beef tea may be taken hot, with a sprinkling of pepper, or sipped cold, or even taken iced. In this matter, as a rule, it is safe enough to trust to the patient's tastes.

The same remarks hold good with regard to chicken tea, and with mutton tea.

Mutton broth is a valuable invalid food. I need not give a receipt, only a warning, for what is called Scotch broth is also made with mutton, but though it possesses

all the nutrient qualities of the pearl barley, still the amount of vegetables it contains renders it unfit for the delicate invalid.

Among the cooling drinks I may mention arrow-root-water. It is so simply made and contains much that is strengthening. Put a table-spoonful in a basin, and drizzle it with cold water into a paste, then pour on boiling water, and stir till you have formed a thinish starch. It is next diluted with cold water till it is about the consistency of cream, sweetened and flavoured if found necessary, and it is ready. But, unless by the doctor's express orders, neither brandy nor sherry should be added.

Barley-water is not so much used as it ought to be, owing perhaps to its taking more trouble to make, but it is invaluable, nevertheless. Briefly speaking, it is prepared thus:—Well wash an ounce of pearl barley, throwing away the water, then add a quart of water and a morsel of lemon-peel, and let it simmer, with constant stirring, till thick enough; sugar and the juice of lemons may now be added to taste.

Cream of tartar drink is very cooling. Stir a drachm of the tartar into a pint of boiling water, with a morsel of lemon-peel and sugar to taste. It is, of course, taken cold or iced.

I need only remind the reader of whey, lemonade, and orgeat. They are too well known to need description.

Of soda-water with milk I have only to say, while admitting it is cool and nutritive, that it should only be taken in small quantities at a time, and the effervescence should have partly passed off before it is used, otherwise it is apt to uncomfortably disturb the stomach.

Now, a word or two about more solid food; and first come eggs, first in rank because they contain everything necessary for nutrition, and are, if properly cooked, generally easy of digestion, though be it remembered they cause biliousness even in the healthy if partaken of too freely.

We have as a good combination raw eggs beaten well and added to milk, to tea, to beef tea, mutton or chicken tea, or to broth.

A raw egg, if it can be swallowed, will often be retained when nothing else could be.

Need I say that eggs for invalids—and everybody else—should be positively and truly new-laid? These are not always easily attainable in towns. I may observe, however, that during the first three months of the egg season—May, June, and July—when there is a glut of eggs in the market, even Irish eggs are fresh and good.

Custard is a delicious form in which to serve eggs.

Poached egg is good, but rather insipid. Omelettes are better, either sweet or savoury.

What the Americans call "mush" is very nice. The eggs are simply well beaten, and milk added; the whole

is poured into a jar, and boiled a few minutes in a saucepan till thick. The salt, I believe, is added to the mush in the jar, and it may be eaten with pepper and a little toast and butter.

So many kinds of puddings are there, that it is difficult to name the best. But in this matter of pudding, if it be ordered by the doctor, I think the patient might as well be consulted. Perhaps he will say tapioca or sago; in either case he has made a very wise choice. Bread-and-butter pudding, I think, should stand higher than it does, only it is made in such a variety of ways, some good, some bad, and often over-done.

Rice pudding requires some care to make it really tasty and digestible, and on the whole I am not in favour of it.

I should not omit to mention a dish that will be new to thousands of my readers. Nay, then, I will mention two, now that I am about it. Both are most nutritious and delicious, and both hail from "yant the Tweed." The first is called "milk broth," and consists of well-washed barley boiled in new milk. The second goes by the name of "milk porridge." It is made in the same way as ordinary porridge. Let the milk come to the boil, having added a sufficiency of salt, then sprinkle in the oatmeal—a medium kind, not too fine—and keep sprinkling and stirring till thick. It needs no extra boiling. But it must not be eaten too hot, rather the reverse.

Calf's-foot jelly should be made at home—a receipt can be had from any ordinary cookery book.

Fish for invalids should be boiled—gently boiled, and prettily garnished and prettily served: indeed, the more neatly and sweetly a sick person's viands are presented the more he will relish them, and with the greater heart and hope will he eat. Let the linen, then, be like snow; let the silver glitter and the glasses sparkle; and if you can throw in a flower, so much the better.

Meats such as beef and mutton should be most tender. Always buy them some days before they are wanted. The cooking ought to be of the best: no unsightly splashes of gravy, nor extra lumps of fat. I have seen the very shape and size of a beef-steak disgust an invalid.

Change is to be studied, and we ring the changes on beef, mutton, fowls, partridges or grouse, or pheasant, and pigeons.

The potatoes are better mashed—very well mashed: not a morsel as big as a pea should remain unbruised—then stirred with a little salt and creamy milk till as white as the driven snow.

Refinement should guide the cooking, as well as the arrangement of the tray in which the invalid's meal is served.

A word about tea. Do not let it be infused longer than three minutes, then pour it off immediately into a second warm tea-pot, and so serve.

