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HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

Friday, May 19, 1933.

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "Food During the Growing Years." Information from the Bureau of Home Economics, U.S.D.A.

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You have often heard the food that we eat compared to the coal burned by a locomotive. The comparison is good so far as it goes. The oxidation of food that occurs in our bodies is similar to the combustion of coal in the engine, and the product that results in each case is energy, with heat as a by-product. But the human body is so much more efficient than an engine that by choosing a suitable combination of foods it can keep itself in repair and good running order; and when it is young, the human engine can increase its size up to certain limits set for it by heredity.

With all that food can do for us, and with the wide variety of attractive foods that we have to select from, here in America, it is too bad for any of us to choose a lop-sided diet that does little except stoke our furnaces and perhaps store up some fat. But a lop-sided diet does much more serious things to children than to us. Those little human engines are still building their framework and increasing their size inside and out, and meanwhile they are traveling around at a terrific rate of speed -- compared with our movements at least -- and so are burning up lots of their food for energy. A poorly-chosen diet for children may stunt their growth and interfere with the perfection of their bodies for all time, and may often make them listless, hollow-eyed, pale, and thin.

So in choosing food for our children, we have to carry not only the responsibility of the fireman who stokes his furnace but also of the builder who constructs the engine, and is careful to put in only the best of steel, brass, and other metals, and to fit them together to make a symmetrically-built, perfectly-running locomotive.

The construction materials that food supplies for the growing body are proteins, mineral elements, and water, but we get them at the dairy and the market as milk, lean meat, fish, poultry, eggs, fruits, and vegetables. For normal growth and good health the child needs vitamins, too, about six of them, but again we get these dietary essentials in the old familiar forms of a wide variety of foods, and in cod-liver oil. To provide for their almost boundless activity, children can use up an abundance of energy foods: cereals, starchy vegetables, easily digested fats, and simple sweets. And so, just as there is nothing new in the world, there is really nothing new to say about children's diets. But the subject is so important that it is always worth re-emphasizing. That's why I'm going to read over to you a check list that you should consider in planning meals for your children, just to make sure you are including a suitable variety for growth, health, and activity. We call them foods for good nutrition, and ask you to ask yourselves if your children get them every day:

Milk: Not less than a pint, and better, from three-fourths of a quart to a whole quart a day.

Butter: Some at every meal.

Cereal, or bread, or potato: One of these at every meal; sometimes whole grain cereals or whole grain breads.

Vegetables - in addition to potatoes: At least two servings daily. Every day serve one kind of vegetable raw, or else cook it quickly to make sure that the children are getting those vitamins that are so easily destroyed by heat.

Simple vegetable salads take care of this need, or for the smallest children, chopped lettuce, chopped celery or cabbage, or grated raw carrots, in small sandwiches. Leafy vegetables -- especially the very green, thin leaves such as spinach, turnip tops, beet tops, and the rest of the family we call "greens" belong in the diet often because they are so rich in iron and other important minerals and in some of the vitamins. But to return to the check list. We were talking about vegetables in general and in particular.

Now fruits: children need fruit once or twice a day. Every child ought to have every day one of the citrus fruits, oranges, tangerines, grape fruit, or else tomato juice. Next, children need egg or meat, (older children may have both) because they are good protein and mineral foods. The yolk of the egg is, besides, one of our best sources of iron and is rich in two vitamins, A and D.

And about sweets: They are all right in their place, which is at the end of meals -- not early in the meal or between meals. And simple sweets are better for children than rich desserts.

So much for the kinds of food. Quantity is important in feeding children too. For the active, healthy child, the appetite is a pretty good guide to quantity if parents provide a wise variety, and hold sweets out until last. If increase in body height and weight keep apace, so that the body is well-proportioned, you need not worry about figuring the calories for children. Though it is interesting to remember that a good-sized boy of 14 years who is still growing requires about 3000 calories -- as much food as his father who may be much larger but through growing; and a girl of about 12 is likely to have about the same food needs as her mother. These children are at the easily-embarrassed age; let's be sure not to thoughtlessly chide them about their big appetites. Be glad, rather, that they have that priceless combination, good appetite and good digestion, and with Shakespeare, hope that health will wait on both.

Monday: "Home Baking."

