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Housekeepers' Chat

Friday, May

Not for Publication

Subject: "Proper Food Habits Lay the Foundation for Child Health." Information from Miriam Birdseye, Extension Nutritionist, U. S. D. A.

Bulletins available: F. B. 717, "Food for Young Children."

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This talk is especially for mothers. It is for mothers who know that proper food habits lay the foundation for the health of their children.

Before I planned this program, I talked with Miriam Birdseye, Extension Nutritionist of the Department of Agriculture.

"I wish you'd tell me," I said, "what it takes to bring about perfect growth in a child."

"Aunt Sammy," said Miss Birdseye, "many factors act together to bring about perfect growth, but two of them are outstanding: food and sunlight. Food furnishes the raw material, to build the growing body. Sunlight helps the body to make the best use of this building material.

"Do you know that the first two years of a child's life are the foundation years, in every sense of the word? At birth, the ends of the baby's bones still consist largely of cartilage or gristle. If anything interferes with orderly growth and hardening, during these early years, Nature cannot repair the defects entirely, and the bones will always be somewhat abnormal in shape. This sometimes brings about serious consequences, in later life. The enamel on the crowns of the baby teeth is being completed, and the crowns of many permanent teeth are being begun. Nature finds it very hard to improve poorly built enamel, and poor enamel opens the door to tooth decay. In these first two years, the muscles are racing to keep pace with the bones; the blood is increasing in amount; all the organs are growing in size and power, and the body as a whole is developing a resistance to disease. Do you see, Aunt Sammy, why the first two years are the foundation years?"

"Indeed I do," I said. "But judging by the number of school children, who have poor teeth and who show signs of rickets, there must be many mothers who do not realize the importance of proper food habits during the first two or three years of a child's life. Isn't that so?"

"Yes," said Miss Birdseye. "The other day I heard the medical officer of a nearby county speak on the tremendous number of tooth defects he found among the six thousand odd school children whom he examined this year. He also told of the many, many pre-school children who showed signs of early rickets, in poorly shaped heads and chests, knock-knees, curved legs, and lowered arches. Defects such as these, he said, have their foundation in poor growth during the first two or three years. It was encouraging to

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hear him say that the children now entering school at the age of six show up just a little better than they did the year before, because they get a better start. I am sure school physicians, the country over, have the same story to tell."

"What are the food habits necessary to give a child a good health foundation?" I asked Miss Birdseye, and she answered my question by telling me a story. It was the story of Thomas and Mary Wise, an up-to-date young farm couple, and how they went about it to feed their first baby. They had been told, that although the first hundred years may be the hardest, the first two or three are the ones that count for most in building health, and they reckoned that it was a fundamental part of their farm management program to give their baby the very best possible start.

For a year, Thomas and Mary Wise had been farming on shares, on a rather run-down farm, with the motto, "Team play in everything." Up to the present, they had not paid much attention to the food supply on this farm, but now they sat down together, and planned some important additions to it, so that Mary might have the foods that would help her bring a strong baby into the world, and nurse him when he arrived.

Tom bought a second cow, added some high producing hens to his scanty flock, and planted an extra good garden, setting out in it some additional small fruits. He surprised the old orchard by pruning and spraying it, the first attention it had had in years. These changes made it possible for Mary to have, at small expense, the foods she needed while awaiting her baby.

Her diet included, every day, milk, an egg and some meat, an abundance of fruits and vegetables -- some fresh and some cooked -- and plenty of greens. She also ate whole grain cereals, and dark breads, along with her white bread, and drank plenty of water. Outdoor exercise, plenty of sleep at night, and a short rest period each day, put her in condition to benefit by these good foods.

Mary needed one thing more -- two in fact -- plenty of sunlight, and in addition, small quantities of codliver oil, sunlight's assistant. She did some work in the garden, as a kind of health insurance, but Tom saw to it that she did not overwork.

When Tom, Junior, was laid in her arms, Mary continued her building program. A generous amount of breast milk of good quality was his first and most important food. Within the first year Mary gradually added orange juice or tomato juice; well-cooked cereals, some of them made from the whole grains; egg yolk; and strained or mashed vegetables, using spinach and carrots at first. Soon after, she prepared fruits both cooked and raw, and finally added baked potato to the husky young man's menu.

Lo and behold! By the time Tommy Wise was a year old, he had a diet which contained practically the same foods his mother used before he came, except for the meat, which was not added until a little later.

Mary Wise took three special precautions, to insure fine bones and teeth for young Thomas. First, she gave him a few drops of codliver oil each day, beginning a few weeks after he arrived. Second, she started sun-

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baths at the same time, when the weather permitted. This was because she learned that sunshine develops a substance in a child's body which is necessary for the proper growth of his bones and teeth, but which is found in quantity in very few of our natural foods -- in fact, only in egg yolk and codliver oil.

How Tommy gurgled and kicked in the sunshine! And how happy Mary was to know that no matter how rapidly he grew, sunshine and codliver oil, along with good wholesome food, would make sure that his little bones and teeth got their full share of needed building materials. She knew also that codliver oil was helping Tommy to resist disease, and she kept on giving him a little every day, until he was two years old.

Mary's third precaution was to provide Tommy with hard crackers, oven toast, and crusts to chew, as soon as his first tiny teeth were cut. This chewing helped to strengthen his jaw muscles, develop well-shaped jaws, and bring plenty of blood to the roots of his tiny teeth.

The fine thing about Mary's plan was that the foods Tommy learned to use during his first year, plus meat in proper amounts, and a few sweets, were exactly the kind he will need during his second year, and his third, and so on until he is no longer a baby, but a school boy, and a young man ready for college, and finally a parent in his own right. It will be only a question of increasing the amount.

I wouldn't have time to tell you just when Mary introduced each of these new foods into Tommy's diet, or how she planned and prepared his meals. If you wish to know more about these important matters, you might write to the U. S. Children's Bureau, Washington, D. C., for the Baby's Daily Time Card, and to the U. S. Bureau of Home Economics for the bulletin called "Food for Young Children."

Monday: "Establish Good Food Habits Early." Another talk for mothers.

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