

Diet after the Fast

Many people write me, begging me to outline for them the ideal diet. I used to do that sort of thing, but I have stopped; having come to realize that we are still at the beginning of our diet-experiments. I have done a good deal of experimenting myself, and have made some interesting discoveries. I have lived for a week on fruit only, and again on wheat only; I have lived for three weeks on nothing but milk, and again on nothing but beef-steak. I have lived for a year on raw food, and for over three years I professed the religion of vegetarianism. For the last two months I have lived on beef-steak, shredded wheat, raisins and fresh fruit; but by the time this book appears I may be trying sour milk and dates—somebody told me about that the other day, and it sounds good to me. Some of my correspondents object to my willingness to try new diets; they write me that they find it bewildering, and think it indicative of an unstable mind. They do not [\[Pg 82\]](#) realize that I am exacting in my demands—I want a diet which will permit me to overwork with impunity. I haven't found it yet, but I am on the way; and meantime I make my experiments with a light heart, for I always know that if anything goes wrong, I can take a fast and start afresh.

The general rules are mostly of a negative sort. There are many kinds of foods, some of them most generally favored, of which one may say that they should never be used, and that those who use them can never be as well as they would be without them. Such foods are all that contain alcohol or vinegar; all that contain cane sugar; all that contain white flour in any one of its thousand alluring forms of bread, crackers, pie, cake, and puddings; and all foods that have been fried—by which I mean cooked with grease, whether that grease be lard, or butter, or eggs or milk. It is my conviction that one should bar these things at the outset, and admit of no exceptions. I do not mean to say that healthy men and women cannot eat such things and be well; but I say that they cannot be as well as they would be without them; and that every particle of such food they eat renders them more liable to all sorts of infection, and sows in their systems the seeds of the particular chronic disease that is to lay them low sooner or later.

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There are a number of other things, which I do not rate as quite so bad, but which we bar in our family—simply because they are not so good. For instance, I am inclined to regard beans as being too difficult of digestion and too liable to fermentation to be eaten by any one who can get anything better. And I personally do not eat peanuts, because I have found that I do not digest them; and I do not use milk (except in the exclusive milk diet), because it is constipating, and I have a tendency in that direction. Almost everyone will discover idiosyncrasies of that sort in his own system. One person cannot digest cheese, another cannot digest bananas, another cannot stand the taste of olive oil. You may read a glowing account of some diet system by which some other person has worked miracles, and you may try it, and persist in it for a long time, and finally

come to realize that it was the worst diet you could possibly have been following. I have always counted orange juice as the ideal food with which to break a fast; yet a friend whom I was advising broke his fast with the juice of half an orange, and had a violent cramp. He had been so confiding in my greater knowledge that he had omitted to tell me that any sort of acid fruit had always made him ill.

Such things as this are of course not natural;[Pg 84] but a perfectly normal and well person is, under the artificial conditions of our bringing up, a very great rarity; and so we all have to regard ourselves as more or less diseased, and work towards the ideal of soundness. We must do this with intelligence—there is no short cut, no way to save one's self the trouble of thinking.

I used to think there was. I would discover this or that wonderful new diet-wrinkle, and I would go round preaching it to all my friends, and making a general nuisance of myself. And some one would try it, and it would not work; and often, to my own humiliation, I would discover that it was not working in my own case half so well as I had thought it was.

By way of setting an ideal, let me give you the example of a young lady who for six or seven months has been living in our home, and giving us a chance to observe her dietetic habits. This young lady three years ago was an anæmic school-teacher, threatened with consumption, and a victim of continual colds and headaches; miserable and beaten, with an exophthalmic goitre which was slowly choking her to death. She fasted eight days, and achieved a perfect cure. She is to-day bright, alert and athletic; and she lives on about twelve hundred calories of food a day—one half what I eat, and less than a third of the old-school[Pg 85] dietetic standards. Occasionally she will eat nut butter, or sweet potato, or some whole wheat crackers with butter, or a dish of ice-cream; but at least ninety per cent of her food has consisted of fresh fruit. Meal after meal, day after day, I have seen her eat one or two bananas and two or three peaches, or say, a slice of watermelon or canteloupe; at some meals she will eat only the peaches, and then again she will eat nothing. A dollar a week would pay for all her food; and on this diet she laughs and talks, reads and thinks, walks and swims with my wife and myself—a kind of external dietetic conscience, which we would find it hard to get along without. And tell me, Dr. Woods Hutchinson, or other scoffer at the "food-faddists," don't you think that a case like this gives us some right to ask for patient investigation of our claims? Or will you stand by your pill boxes and your carving-knives and the rest of your paraphernalia, and compel us to cure all your patients in spite of you?