



¶ This little pamphlet is the fifth in the series of "Health Notes," that are sponsored by the Women's Auxiliary of the Jewish General Hospital.

These health notes have been authorized and prepared under the auspices of the Medical Board of the hospital and are written to guide you, in your task of safeguarding the health of your family and yourself. It is sincerely hoped that you will find them informative and useful.



“HEART DISEASE”

“HEART DISEASE” — What does this phrase mean? Authors of detective stories give a simple answer, a convenient form of disease by which they dispose of those of their victims which do not die violent deaths. This is far too simple an idea of what heart disease means. There are five major kinds of heart disease and each of these groups includes many different sub-varieties. In most instances, the patient lives many years, often the normal span of life.

There are individuals born with abnormalities of the heart due to faulty construction of the heart in the course of their earliest development. In some of these, the heart functions as though it were normal, in others, especially in those who show a great degree of blueness of the lips, fingertips and tongue, the abnormality found at or after birth is a serious one. Until a few years ago, a doctor could only prescribe careful living and restriction of physical activity for the control of the weakness suffered by these latter patients; at present, however, in some of these cases, a surgical operation can make all the difference between a short, uncomfortable existence and a long, indeed a normal duration of life and a good measure of physical strength.

One of the great problems that remains to be solved is to establish the cause of Rheumatic Fever, in order that a better study of its prevention and cure might be achieved. Rheumatic fever tends to cause heart disease, especially in young people. The degree of

heart disease is, of course, variable. In many cases, it is only slight and therefore compatible with normal habits of life. In other cases, it is severe and calls for regulation of the daily habits so as to prevent excessive fatigue. A very dangerous complication of Rheumatic Fever, which results from growth of bacteria on scarred heart valves, which characterize Rheumatic Heart disease, may however be cured at present with the antibiotics, that is, Penicillin, Aureomycin, etc. Until 1944, when it was shown that these antibiotics could cure this condition, this had been almost invariably a fatal disease. Physicians who were familiar with this disease, which is known as Sub-acute Bacterial Endocarditis, before 1944, now have a warm glow of satisfaction when they find such a patient and cure the disease in a few weeks, thus saving the life which might otherwise have been lost. Those who have Rheumatic Heart Disease or an abnormality of the heart which developed at birth, should receive Penicillin in adequate doses whenever an infection in some other part of the body, such as an abscessed tooth, or an abscess of the skin or acute tonsillitis, is to be dealt with. For it is following infections of this kind that Sub-acute Bacterial Endocarditis may develop and by adequate treatment with the antibiotics may be prevented.

Of the remaining forms of heart disease, perhaps the most common is that related to high blood pressure. This develops usually very slowly over a period of twenty or thirty years. It is hoped that the great activity that is now in progress in search of the cause of

high blood pressure, may result in knowledge which will contribute towards the prevention of this form of heart disease. In the meantime, physicians must continue to use the best means available towards the control of the progress of the disease so as to prolong useful lives.

Statistics as to the cause of death, in this part of the world, all show that people live much longer than they did fifty years ago. Because of this, those forms of heart disease which occur commonly in elderly people are now found more frequently in the general population than in former years. It is no exaggeration to state that sometime in the future it will be quite normal for people to live an average of 100 years, and many will live longer. This will occur only when the control of the process of aging will be better understood than it is now. Research in an endeavour to find means of preventing various forms of heart disease and for curing heart disease has never been more actively pursued than at present, and it is this form of heart disease, related to old age, that is being studied more intensively than any other.

As a result of the study of heart disease during the past fifty years, and particularly during the past twenty-five years, many types of heart disease are better understood and therefore more successfully prevented or treated. In the course of time, perhaps before another twenty-five years have elapsed, the problems which seem insurmountable at present may become readily solved and so before very long it will be quite the usual thing for people to live a whole century.