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MOUTH-BREATHING.*

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ANY discussion of this subject involves some consideration of both the normal and abnormal conditions of the respiratory tract. The supply of air provided for animate life is practically unlimited. In the human race the respiratory passages under normal conditions are quite capable of conveying to and fro an adequate supply of air for the needs of the body. The quantity, the character, and the preparation of the air required in respiration are of even more vital importance than are the same factors in the food supply. A man may live for a few weeks without food, for several days without drink, but only for a few minutes without air. A supply of nutriment is called for three or four times in twenty-four hours, but a fresh supply of air twenty to thirty thousand times.

The respiratory tract consists of the two nasal chambers, of the nasal and oro-pharynx, of the larynx, trachea, bronchial tubes and air cells. The functions of this tract are varied and complex. Provision has to be made, not only for the passage of an adequate supply of air, but the air itself must be more or less radically changed before reaching its destination. The air must be purified, warmed and moistened. The projection of hairs—known as vibrissæ—into the vestibule, and the moist surface of the wide expanse of mucous membrane covering the turbinates and walls of the nasal chambers, arrest most of the foreign bodies in the air, whilst the two or three quarts of warm liquid serum and mucus secreted in the twenty-four hours warm and moisten the air. The accessory cavities—maxillary, frontal, and sphenoidal—act as reservoirs for maintaining a supplementary supply of air.

* Read at meeting of the Ontario Medical Association, Hamilton, Ont., May, 1908.