

Miscellaneous

The Role of Iron in the Nutritive Process.

It is an established custom of physicians to administer iron whenever a patient with pale, waxy, or sallow complexion complains of extreme exhaustion, muscular feebleness, easily accelerated pulse, aphasia, anorexia and the several symptoms which constitute the characteristic issues of a qualitative or quantitative reduction of the corpuscular elements of the blood.

Such symptoms are unerring indications of anemia, and iron is beyond dispute a cure for that disorder. But while the chief therapeutic property of iron is that of an anti-anemic, the subordinate, or collateral, effects of the drug are manifold, and are worthy of far more consideration than they usually receive.

As a hemoglobin-contributor and multiplier of red blood corpuscles, iron will doubtless forever stand supreme, but its utility is by no means restricted to anemic conditions, for one of the chief effects of iron—one quite often lost sight of—is its influence upon nutrition.

The primary effect of iron is a stimulation of the blood supply. This results from invigoration of the blood vessels. As a consequence of a more active blood stream, the digestive capacity is increased and the nutritive processes are correspondingly improved. Subsequently, iron increases the amount of hemoglobin contained in the red corpuscles. This imported hemoglobin converts the systematic oxygen into ozone, and thuswise oxidation, upon which nutrition directly depends, is restored to its proper standard.

It is impossible to emphasize the fact too strongly that it is necessary to do more than increase the appetite to correct nutritive disturbances. A voracious appetite does not necessarily imply an extensive appropriation of nutriment. On the contrary, it is commonly observed that individuals who eat ravenously suffer, the while, a progressive loss in physical weight and strength, even in the absence of all exertions that might account for such losses. And while it is obviously needful to relieve the existing anorexia in order to arrest a loss of weight, it is likewise essential that the capacity to properly digest food be fully restored before the nutritive processes can proceed in befitting order.

The manner in which iron begets an increase in appetite has only recently been perfectly understood. The earlier observers entertained the belief that an increase resulted from the mechanical effect of iron, and that this mechanical effect never