

The Country Home Department

Conducted by Mrs. J. H. Henley, Route 1, Sanford, N. C., to whom all Matter for this Department Should be Sent

Best Methods in Cooking.

By Miss Minnie W. Hopper,
Waynesboro, Miss.

The watchword of those who have the physical interest of the race at heart is not to cure disease but to prevent it. Should all the theories of the health culture sect ripen into reality the next generation would see the undoing of every doctor in the land, and medical schools turned into health resorts, or else their doors forever closed. A large part of the responsibility of bringing about these happy results rests with the housewife whose duty it is to select food and see to its proper preparation. For a highly nutritious article of food may be rendered altogether useless and sometimes positively harmful to the consumer by the method of cooking it. Our text books tell us food is cooked, first, to render it more digestible, second, to make it more palatable, and improve its appearance, third, to season and combine different foods, fourth, destroy parasites and bacteria. Alas! how few women in planning meals ever stop to consider these ends. Ordinarily she follows customary menus, the appetite of those for whom she is preparing the meal, or what is worse, just anything she may find convenient to lay hands upon, and cooks it by the easiest and quickest method, without considering the effect upon the food, or upon the consumer. Certainly these things should, and must be considered, but the most important thing to keep in mind is the giving of a well balanced ration so cooked as to provide the best nourishment to the body. In other words to see that those who sit at her table are so well nourished that they are physically able to meet all requirements of them and be able to give forth their best efforts in every attempt undertaken. To do this requires some knowledge of food and food values on the part of the housewife, and a conscientiousness in using this knowledge. Of the foods that are usually cooked the three classes are proteids, carbohydrates and fats. No matter how elaborate a menu you may sit down to, or how numberless the kind of food you eat, every one of them, with the exception of the water and mineral water they contain belong to some one or perhaps all of these three classes. Most all articles of diet contain always two and usually all of these classes, but in varying proportion, and with different degrees of digestibility. Development, growth and vital activity all depend upon the availability of food in proper amounts and in proper quality. And to properly nourish the body food must supply (1) material for building up and repairing the tissues (2) to produce heat for carrying on the mechanical work of the system (3) to give energy to enable us to do our work. Food given in the right proportions to meet these three ends is called a balanced ration. A balanced ration for adults is usually 20 oz. per day, four oz. of which must be proteid, the remaining sixteen oz. carbohydrates and fats. The proportion of these last two classes making not so much difference except where cost, digestibility, or convenience in getting certain things are to be considered. The 20 oz. of food to make one day's ration is reckoned upon water—free or dry foods. When we take into consideration the amount of water in all foods and the refuse

matter taken into the body we see that we consume in bulk much more than 20 oz per day. It is impossible to regulate diet according to the difect scientific calculations of their composition, and if possible, would entail an immense amount of labor and care. Appetite for a person leading an active life and eating simple food is a good guide. Highly seasoned food and complex mixtures deprave the appetite and make it the worst possible guide. However no matter how well trained the appetite it cannot guide one to eat the right kind of food or the right quantity at a table where the food lacks any of the necessary food classes, or where innutritious food or indigestible food is provided. One extreme is where the ignorant housekeeper does not know the difference between a proteid and a fuel food. The other is where the diet is regulated without reference to the taste of the consumer. The most sensible way is for every intelligent person, and especially every housekeeper to study the proper proportion of foods and calculate with the aid of tables which may be found in any reliable book on dietetics, or best from the government the proper combinations of all foods commonly used, thus acquiring a general idea of food values, then to be guided in the selection of the bill of fare both by the appetite and these general ideas. Intelligence in regard to diet enables a housekeeper to provide nourishing food for less money than an ignorant housewife pays for food deficient in nourishment. We will discuss each class separately as to its function in the body, and the best method of cooking so as to enable the body to get the greatest amount of nourishment from the food taken.

Proteid food is found in largest quantities in the lean of meat, white of egg, casein of milk, gluten of wheat, and in the legume of peas, beans and lentils. Its function in the body is to repair and build tissue. It also produces some energy because of its combustion in the body, and which could not take place without producing heat and energy, but its design is to furnish building material, and it is an extravagance and waste of digestive forces to use it to furnish heat and energy. The next class carbohydrates which includes all foods containing starch and sugar, and which is found in large quantities in potatoes, all vegetables except the legumes, fruits and most cereals, in sugar cane and beets, has for its function the supplying of heat and energy. It cannot build tissues. Fats are found in most nuts, cream, butter, olive oil and fat meat. Its function is to produce heat and energy just as the carbohydrates do, with this difference. Fat produces about twice as much heat as carbohydrates, requires more oxygen for its combustion and often is harder to digest. Many people especially those of sedentary habits had best get their heat and energy largely from the carbohydrates. Some systems digest fat more readily than they do carbohydrates. Fats do not build tissue.

If we are to cook the foods so as to get the greatest amount of good from them we must study the effect of heat upon each kind of food the result of the addition of water, and the method of applying heat. Proteid is

coagulated by intense heat, becomes hard and is rendered indigestible. So it is at this point where we need to be careful in cooking the proteids. Lean meat and eggs are both more digestible if eaten before they are cooked too thoroughly. There is no reason for ever cooking eggs until they are done, but many people are afraid of rare lean meat because of trychina or other parasites. The methods of cooking meats are roasting, boiling, baking, stewing, braising and frying. The best method is probably stewing, while frying is the worst possible method. We often hear of the "deadly frying pan," and no wonder. It is responsible for more dyspeptics than any other method of cooking. As bad as frying is it is a much worse method in the hands of some cooks than others. If we must fry let the grease be very hot, so that a crust is formed on the outside of the meat, and thus it retains all juices and meat flavors. If the grease is not hot enough, it soaks in and makes soggy food. On the other hand grease heated too much becomes decomposed into acids and other indigestible products.

Stewing is probably the most nutritious economical and healthful way. The object of stewing is to cook the meat so that it will be juicy and tender, and to serve with it the broth in which it has been cooked, which shall also be rich in flavor and appetizing. Obviously to put the meat in boiling water prevents the broth from receiving its full quota of flavor and food, and at the same time to put it in cold water enriches the broth at too great an expense of the meat. The usual method is to cut the meat in small pieces, thus exposing a greater amount of the surface to the water. Put the pieces in milk warm water, bring the water to the simmering point, and allow to simmer for several hours. To allow the water to boil is to defeat the purpose of stewing. Another argument in favor of stewing is that the cheaper cuts of meat, that cannot be cooked any other way, make delicious stews, and are just as nutritious and readily digested as the more expensive cuts. Much waste and extravagance is brought about in buying the more expensive things when the cheaper ones are of equal nutritious value. In most cases we are paying for general appearance of an article or for some extra trouble of putting it on the market rather than for any real food value, or more nutrition.

Vegetable protein, especially that found in peas, beans and lentils are not affected by heat as are the animal protein. They may be cooked at a much higher temperature, and require more water to soften the cellulose. They should always be put to cooking in boiling water, but salt, fat and other seasonings should not be added until they are beginning to get tender. An article of diet containing both proteid and starch requires longer cooking than do those containing a more concentrated form of proteid. The fireless cooker is invaluable for this class of foods. Carbohydrates can scarcely be cooked too long or too much, though there is little, perhaps nothing, to be claimed by cooking them at a high temperature.

The necessity for cooking carbohydrates for a long time and at a low temperature lies in the fact that the cell walls of the starch granules are formed of cellulose. Cellulose is insoluble in water but is softened by an application of boiling water for a long time. The digestive juices of man have little or no