

1926

## EC974 Nature's Spring Tonics

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Feb. 1937

Nebraska  
COOPERATIVE EXTENSION WORK  
IN AGRICULTURE AND HOME ECONOMICS  
1926 U. of N. Agr. College & U. S. Dept. of Agr. Cooperating  
W. H. Brokaw, Director, Lincoln Extension  
Circular  
974

Out of Print

### NATURE'S SPRING TONICS

#### Use of Spring Medicines by Pioneers

No doubt some of you recall the practices of your grandmothers in combatting spring fever at this season of the year or possibly a little later. There was the frequent treatment with sulphur and molasses, the periodical dosing with bitters and the use of sassafras tea in the spring in order to thin the blood which was supposed to become impure and "thick" during the winter. Our pioneer ancestors seem to have had the idea that there was need for a tonic of some kind in the spring. There can be little doubt but what this belief rested on common experience. Indeed, even to-day as we pass the drug stores we may see that an effort is being made to encourage the practice of taking spring tonics. We see window displays of sassafras bark, bottles of bitters, liver salts, and iron tonics.

#### Effects of Deficient Diet

We know that in the early settlement of the middle western states, the pioneers suffered many hardships. With little money and no food reserve their winter diet was generally very simple and monotonous. There might be corn-meal products, molasses, cured meats, and possibly potatoes. The cows were apt to be dry so that there was a scanty milk supply and the chickens stopped producing eggs with the onset of winter. People lacked facilities for canning and storing a supply of fruits and vegetables, so the diet was very limited, indeed. In the light of our present knowledge of nutrition, there is reason to believe that the winter diet of the early settlers was not satisfactory for the maintenance of health. After a period of several months of winter, people generally felt "run down." The almanacs, sent out by patent medicine concerns, discussed the tired feeling which people had in the spring. Their suggestive appeals convinced people that they needed a course of treatment with sarsaparilla, a "blood purifier" or some other sort of "spring tonic". The use of these tonics was so universal that it established the belief that winter was an unhealthful season.

#### Adequate Diet Makes Spring Medicines Unnecessary

In many of these same communities today we find modern farm homes, well supplied with dairy herds, orchards, gardens, and all signs of prosperity. There is not much difference between the winter and summer diets, because of the practice of canning fruits and vegetables and modern transportation facilities make fresh foods available throughout the winter. Cabbage, turnips, lettuce, carrots, celery, apples, oranges, lemons, and grapefruit are regularly provided throughout the winter. Where such dietary practices are followed, there is an absence of that "tired feeling" at the end of winter, and consequently no need for spring medicines.

Recent advances in nutrition show us that the vendor of spring medicines had a powerful ally in the spring diet of his customers. With the coming of warm weather various "greens" were available and were eagerly consumed. Wild onions, sorrel, dandelions and lambs quarters grew in abundance on the prairies and were promptly added to the food supply. The cows, due to their starved condition, had been dry all winter, became fresh and milk was available. The hens added worms, insects and tender grass to their diet and began to lay eggs. The garden furnished fresh vegetables which were eaten with keen relish. The first wild fruits of the season were eagerly sought. The "tired feeling" disappeared about this time, but



the spring medicines had been taken and the good results of the better diet and life in the fresh air were wrongly attributed to the medicines.

#### Mrs. Never Well's Medicine Chest

We must keep in mind that one of the functions of food is to regulate body processes. With a wise choice of diet it is possible to practically eliminate the medicine chest from the home. Did you ever hear of Mrs. Never Well's Medicine Chest? She has several bottles of iron tonics and blood purifiers, and others of bitters and so on. For headache cures she has aspirin and bromo-seltzer. She treats constipation by keeping on hand senna, mineral oil and pills. She has antacid pills, fruit salts, kidney pills, remedies for rheumatism and dozens of other remedies, not to mention complexion beautifiers and cosmetics.

#### Mrs. Never Well's Meals

Now let us see what Mrs. Never Well feeds her family. If they have bread, meat and potatoes with some sweet at the end of the meal they are satisfied. Mrs. Never Well's husband does not feel that he has had a real dinner without pie. Her children eat so much candy that they are seldom hungry at meal time. It isn't any use for Mrs. Never Well to cook vegetables, because her family won't eat them and she just has to throw them out. Mrs. Never Well doesn't blame her family because she doesn't like vegetables herself. The children are under weight but Mrs. Never Well isn't concerned about this because she says she was just like them when she was a child. She doesn't seem to realize that she was not up to standard and that as a child she laid the foundation for her present unsatisfactory state of health.

#### Health Promoting Foods

Let us now consider the types of foods which will regulate body processes in such a manner as to make spring medicines unnecessary. First will be adequate amounts of milk and dairy products and eggs. Second, fruits, vegetables and whole grain cereals. Third, some raw or uncooked fruit or vegetable in the diet each day. These foods are excellent sources of the minerals and vitamins which are body regulators. Foods like egg yolk, spinach, lettuce, onions, cabbage, carrots, strawberries, raisins, prunes, dates, graham bread, lean beef, are excellent sources of iron. They are better blood purifiers than any bottled blood tonic in the drug store. The raisin growers would like to have us believe that in order to get our iron we must eat raisins, but there are many foods which are rich in iron.

The type of diet which Mrs. Never Well gives her family results in an acid condition in the blood. This may be overcome by the use of vegetables, fruit (with the exception of plums, prunes, and cranberries) and milk. The use of these foods is much more effective than the use of soda, antacid pills or fruit salts.

Milk, butter, green leafy vegetables, carrots and egg yolks also furnish vitamin A which prevents eye disease and tendency to lung infections.

The uncooked vegetables like cabbage, celery, carrots, and lettuce, and fruits like oranges, lemons and grapefruit and tomatoes, raw or cooked, furnish vitamin C which is necessary for the prevention of scurvy. Scientists now feel that latent scurvy was responsible for much of the "tired feeling" of which our pioneer ancestors complained. Irritability in children may be due to the same cause. The prevention of this condition may be accomplished by the simple measure of including some uncooked food in the diet daily.



The yeast interests are advertising very widely the merits of their product as a source of vitamins. As a matter of fact yeast furnished only one of the vitamins necessary for the maintenance of health. This is the B vitamin and its use in the diet prevents nervous disorders and stimulates appetite and digestion. This vitamin is the most widely distributed in foods of any of the vitamins so if the diet is deficient in vitamin B it is apt to be deficient in other respects also. Vitamin B is found in fruits, vegetables, whole grain cereals, milk, navy beans and liver. The only foods not containing it are fats, and oils, sugar, starch, white rice and white flour. So we see that in a well-chosen diet there will be an adequate supply of vitamin B without the use of yeast. The beneficial results which people attribute to the use of yeast are in reality due to the other foods which an improved appetite leads them to eat.

The prevention of constipation is a highly important factor in combatting that "tired feeling" in the spring. The diet which is lacking in fruits, vegetables and coarse breads and cereals tend to encourage constipation because the food is too completely absorbed in the process of digestion. Under such condition the waste products and poisons formed in the body are not eliminated as speedily as they should be, and, as a result, people have headaches, muddy complexions and feel "dragged out" and tired. Fruits, vegetables and coarse breads contain bulk or cellulose which is not absorbed from the digestive tract and this furnished ballast for intestinal movement. One can appreciate how common constipation is by noticing the advertisements in street cars, on billboards, and in newspapers. Laxatives and cathartics in the form of drugs are a poor substitute for natural foods in the control of constipation.

#### Making People Like Vegetables

A word may be said in answer to the argument often given that people do not like vegetables. There are two reasons for this. One is that many people have not learned to like vegetables in early childhood and the other is that vegetables are so often carelessly and poorly prepared. Children should be taught to eat and enjoy all natural foods. The example of the parents and older members of the family is of utmost importance in accomplishing this. People who have been taught to eat a large variety of natural foods in childhood get much more enjoyment from their food and have better health as a result.

There are comparatively few housewives who take as much interest and pride in preparing an attractive and palatable dish of carrots or spinach as in making an angel food cake. When we consider the importance of vegetables in maintaining health, are we not putting emphasis in the wrong place when we give more attention to fancy cookery than to the more substantial foods in the diet? Well-cooked vegetables, simply prepared with butter or white sauce and well-seasoned, need not require an unreasonable amount of the housewife's time and everyone can learn to enjoy eating them. Doctors who specialize in the treatment of children prescribe the use of vegetable water and strained vegetables for babies six months of age. When children acquire a taste for vegetable flavors at so early an age, they will not be apt to refuse them when they grow older.

#### Planning the Garden

Since it is almost time for spring gardening, some thought may well be given to definite planning in this regard, especially for farm people. The Extension Service has a circular Number 988 on the Fruit and Vegetable Budget which will be

sent on request. This budget plans for the proper amounts of fruits and vegetables to be canned and stored for use during the eight non-growing months in order to provide for the health of the family. A budget of this kind prevents canning an overly large amount of any one thing. Following the budget provides a pleasing variety during the winter. Perhaps you have had the experience yourself of canning three times as many string beans as your family ate and they became so tired of them that you didn't dare put them on the table any longer.

In using the Fruit and Vegetable Budget it is possible to plan your garden in such a way that you may have a reasonable surplus for canning and storing, provided weather conditions are favorable. You can plan quite definitely for the amounts of tomatoes, greens, peas, cherries, peaches, etc. which your family can eat and then can as nearly according to your plan as possible.

The carrying out of such a plan will provide the members of your family with such foods during the winter as will keep them in good health and make the use of spring medicines unnecessary. Such a plan for feeding the family is just as consistent as planning wardrobes for clothing the family in order to use money to the best advantage. It is not too early to begin planning to make next winter's diet such as will make it include Nature's best "spring tonics".

(Prepared by Matilda Peters, Home Economics Department)

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