

5

*Controversial
opinion?*

A. M. Sullivan, Editor
Dun's Review
99 Church Street
New York 8, N. Y.

1959

Dear Sir:

Repetition of the same old sops about executive health still sells articles it seems. And certain "commercial" diagnostic houses pad the doctors' pockets by catering to the waning prowess of our overpaid, overfed, high strung executive horse-flesh. "Is your memory playing tricks" by Jack J. Friedman would be par for the course if it were not for its attempt to introduce fresh angles, which resulted in errors, some just expensive, some serious.

After the usual flattery of your readers by building up the "stress and strain" concept of aging and "executive diseases," and the usual mid-day nap stuff, the pamper yourself with personal comfort pap, and the exercise but gently routine, we have some new ideas for sale. These include air-conditioning, cutting down on animal fats, eating five times a day, studying a language, and taking vitamins.

There is, of course, no reason why a big shot with a Mercedes shouldn't have any harmless toy he wants including air-conditioning, as long as it is realized important health benefits of such machines are only established for asthmatics and people with manifest heart disease.

And taking vitamins is considered by many doctors in about the same category, ie. they don't hurt you and do no harm if one can afford them. There is no sense in discussing their toxic properties since rather huge amounts of therapeutic type vitamins are required over a long period to cause kidney stones and other illness. But it is a gross misstatement to say that "medical experts are unanimous in their verdict" -- that vitamins are "definitely advisable". This is hogwash, and virtually no scientist in the field of nutrition thinks it "advisable to provide an additional source". Few physicians are scientists and many of them use vitamins knowingly as placebos, but Mr. Friedman has done us further dis-service to state that "geriatric formulas on sale (presumably over the counter) in drugstores get a qualified endorsement". Probably 99% of physicians and nutrition authorities would have been delighted to see these formulas go the way of their TV quiz shows. Such

preparations invite stupid self-diagnosis, encourage pharmacists to "play doctor", disguise or distort serious blood diseases, and are purely and simply a modern version of the potion of the old medicine man minstrels, including their wicked little volumes-percent of demon rum.

Now as to eating five times a day, it appears in experiments on rats that both weight and blood fats may be favorably influenced by nibbling all day without ever having a big meal. But the food available to most executives between meals, dispensed as caffeine and sweet cold and hot drinks and candy bars, is hardly to be advised as a health measure.

Nothing opens intellectual horizons and human understanding more than mastering a foreign language. Bravo! But the idea that a few mental gymnastics can eliminate the serious sign of mental lapses resulting from loss of or fatigue of brain cells is preposterous. Memory exercises may make friends and influence people by slightly improving performance in a limited mental province, such as recalling names and phone numbers. They are hardly crutches for brain cells sick from alcohol and lack of sleep or dead from fatty blockage of their arterial blood supply.

The most serious misleading statement of your article is that about keeping blood cholesterol to a minimum, that—"there is just one simple way to do that. As far as possible, substitute vegetable oils for the animal fats in your diet." You will deserve more than the propaganda blast you are to receive from the meat and dairy industry. Perhaps you should be sued for malpractice. There is surely one simpler way, ie. just pop down expensive, inadequately studied, cholesterol - lowering pills and solutions, and fatten up the eager drug companies. But actually your advice, carried to its logical conclusion, is to become vegetarian. No responsible scientist has recommended this. An overall reduction of calories to 25 to 35% from fat has been recommended to the American public by the most authoritative group concerned with our coronary epidemic, the Central Committee of the American Heart Association.

The elimination of one unit of saturated fat (of either - animal or vegetable origin) is about twice as efficient in cholesterol lowering effect as adding one unit of unsaturated fat (of either animal or vegetable origin). Substitution of a "substantial part of the saturated fat in the diet may also be a valuable addition to this program" (for overweights, hypertensives, hypercholesteremics, and other "coronary prone" types —among executives, even among their fair haired aspirants, their lackadaisical clerks, and their unharried janitors who, strangely enough are apparently equally afflicted.

Yours,

Henry W. Blackburn, Jr., M.D.
Medical Director
Associate Professor of Physiological Hygiene, University of Minnesota