

Restricting his activities needn't be an ordeal for the sick child and his mother.

by Jerry Klein

EVEN WITH VACCINES AND VITAMINS, Winter is the season of coughs, running noses, and days in bed for the small fry. And mothers have the problem of keeping Johnny from feeling that being bedridden is like being in jail, while at the same time preventing him from infecting the other

How to Keep Small Fry Happy in Bed

members of the family.

Nothing can possibly make illness a pleasure for parent or child, but planning can ease the whole family over the rough spots:

1. How much activity? The doctor, of course, will give instructions on the medical regimen and special care, but parents can avoid needlessly restricting the child's play by inquiring about ordinary activity, too. How many hours of sleep are necessary? Should the child sit up? Can he get out of bed for brief periods? How much contact is permitted with other children? Is reading or watching television all right, or should shades be drawn and the room kept in half-light?

2. Spending more time with the child. When a child is ill or convalescing, he needs comforting and reassurance more than ever. In addition, he is less capable of amusing himself. This does not mean, however, that a parent should devote all day to the child. The attention span of a sick child is shorter than normal—one short story or a few pages from a book is enough at one time.

A child confined to bed often is content merely to know that Mother is nearby. Routine household tasks done within sight of his bed are comforting.

3. A routine is valuable. When a child is ill, he is less capable than ever of judging his strength. A formal schedule will provide for medicine and rest when he needs it, avoiding overstimulation or fatigue. An hour-by-hour written schedule which he himself helps plan may be fun for the child, too. And when nap time arrives, there can be no complaint—it's written right there on the paper!

4. Encourage easy play. With a sick child, the normal aim of play is exactly reversed. Instead of

encouraging him to invent, be creative, or participate, the goal is merely to get him through the day without too much restlessness so he will recover his strength. Therefore, easy games and toys requiring little effort should be chosen.

5. Make a game of food. Since young patients generally are fussy about what they eat or disinterested in food altogether, meals should be made part of the fun. Unless the doctor has provided a special diet, there's little reason why the child shouldn't have his favorite dishes every meal—and even a double dessert (portions needn't be large). Whatever you serve can be made more interesting by an imaginative touch. It's easy, for instance, to cut toast into strips or odd geometrical patterns with a knife or cookie cutter, and a story can be made up around every dish.

Of course, meals for the sick room also pose a problem in hygiene for the family. Dishes used by a sick child may be boiled to prevent infecting others; but since sterilization is time-consuming, many families use disposable paper service. Paper cups, plates, and place mats are inexpensive, and they add a cheerful note to a sick-room tray.

Every meal can have its element of surprise. It doesn't really take much: an orange dotted with raisins and topped by a paper cup becomes a clown, for instance. Or a child's paper hat can be made by simply cutting the brim or visor from a paper plate, taping it to a paper cup to form the crown, and adding an elastic band.

With a bit of imagination, affection, and planning, a minor illness or convalescence can be made to pass quickly—and your child may even look back on it as a pleasant experience!



It's the simple things that entertain, and Mother's thoughtful surprise package will keep that smile of expectancy until the beribboned gift is opened after lunch.