

Are You Dieting Dangerously?

By THEODORE IRWIN

OBSESSED with the elusive vision of a slim figure, an increasing number of Americans are joining the hunt for a quick-and-easy way to subtract weight—"crash diets," "pills that melt pounds away," advice on "breaking up fatty deposits," and programs to "stop counting calories."

What most citizens don't realize is that unscientific fad dieting can be harmful to their health. Leading nutrition authorities, alarmed at the trend, point to a wide variety of ill-effects from dietary deficiencies in persons who go off on a poorly devised reducing binge.

"There have been definite neurological disturbances, with patients on the verge of convulsions, when they have gone too long on a so-called milk diet alone, due to magnesium deficiencies," says Dr. Charles Glen King, president of the Nutrition Foundation. "Continued severe protein deficiencies may cause loss of hair and premature graying. Skin eruptions have resulted from a diet of unbalanced fats."

Dr. Elmer L. Severinghaus, associate director of the Institute of Nutrition Sciences at Columbia University, warns that lack of vital nutrients in a fad diet can bring on weakness and fatigue that could lead to serious accidents.

On the basis of his work with overweight patients in a clinic, Dr. Albert Stunkard, professor of psychiatry at the University of Pennsylvania, found that a high percentage of women showed severe emotional disorders in connection with their drastic dieting.

Total fasting is one of the current vogues among frantic "fatties" determined to slenderize at any cost. The starvation idea received nationwide impetus last fall, following an experiment in a Philadelphia hospital where obese patients lost a lot of weight after being wholly deprived of food for 10 days, with no intake but water, tea, coffee, and vitamins.

Many overweight men and women who had heard about the wholesale weight losses through fasting or who had skimmed through published reports on the project overlooked one important fact: the starvation went on in a hospital, under the watchful eyes of nurses and doctors.

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