

EXERCISE AND REST

BY

LUTHER H. GULICK, M. D.

Director of the Department of Child Hygiene of the Russell Sage Foundation

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EXERCISE AND REST.*

BY DR. LUTHER HALSEY GULICK.

How many of you that are reading this page have started, at some time or other, a systematic course in walking, dumb-bells, Indian clubs, or some other form of exercise? Most of you, I am sure. But how many of you have kept it up? Comparatively few I am reasonably certain. Here lies the real difficulty in connection with our present ideas of exercise. It is not a difficulty relative to knowledge; for in these days we all know what we should do. It is a difficulty relative to desire.

Not because my experience with regard to this matter is peculiar, but because I imagine you will smile in finding out how like it is to your own, I venture to give it. It has been my professional business for over twenty-five years to promote physical exercise and recreation. As soon as the emphasis in my work changed from the actual teaching of physical exercises to executive management, I dropped all formal exercising, and took only that exercise which pleased me—as most people do. During the summer I camped out and swam and boated. During the winter I started many times with dumb-bells and Indian clubs, to exercise faithfully in my room for ten or fifteen minutes each day. But I never kept it up. I have asked hundreds of people as to their experience in this matter. Almost all have praised the theoretical idea of daily exercises in one's room—and have confessed to not practising their own preaching. Most have started at some time or other on a course of muscular exercise which would keep the body active and vigorous, but have not kept it up.

This same condition exists among those like myself whose business it was to teach muscular exercises. Few teachers of physical training, after changing their work from the actual teaching of muscular exercises to some other line of work, maintain the two

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hours, or anything like it, of muscular work which it is the custom to advise. Clearly there is a gap between knowledge and practice. How may we bridge this gap?

Added information about the effect of exercise on the circulation, the digestion, the vasomotor system, the feelings, the emotional life, is not needed. It is motive power which shall lead us to actually do what we already know to be good, that is needed. In other words, how shall we create the desire to do that which we know we should do? This is the universal gap between knowing and doing, which must be bridged. The solution proposed to-day is—socialize our efforts, act as communities. "Custom and Wont," "Community-habit," "Fashion"—all must take hold of these matters, or we shall remain in our present condition—doing these things spasmodically and irregularly, or not at all.

When it becomes fashionable, when it becomes good breeding, good form, to be well, then and not till then, will this result be accomplished. Nor is this a far-distant event. Our own generation has seen an awakening in matters of health such as was never dreamed of before. Personal and civic cleanliness is a modern invention. London, not so very long ago, had only dirt, rush-covered floors in most of its houses. The scraps from the table were thrown on the floor for the cats and dogs. When the rushes got too deep and conditions were too bad, the whole mass was swept out into the street, which served as the dump for all garbage and sewage of all the families of the city. And this in London! The city which does that to-day—but there are no civilized cities which do that to-day. Conditions are so different to-day that the city with even bad water is in an apologetic state. When in one year, by the installation of sand filters, Pittsburg cut down the deaths from typhoid from over 500 to practically none, we see the power of public opinion.

Public opinion has changed in other ways. It is no longer well-bred to even talk about ill-health. We are still hindered with relics of the days when one's health and ills were the most interesting topic of conversation. We still say, "How do you do?" But woe to the person who really answers that question! The person who habitually pours out upon the unwilling ears of her friends the disagreeable tale of backaches, worries, and other ills—which we all have from day to day—is slowly but surely isolated by the bar of social exclusion. We know that the psychic con-

tagion which one person can spread by suggestions with reference to disease, is as real as the contagion from measles, or mumps, or scarlet fever. A little red contagious-disease card might justly and wisely be attached to the door of a person with a "grouch," with just as much reason as if that person had scarlet fever.

Modern society has recognized this psychic contagion, and is demanding that our conversation shall be clean, wholesome, on subjects of health. It is now ill-bred unnecessarily to speak of any pathological subject. This is an epoch-making change in the character of human conversation. And it has occurred within the memory of many of us. This changed attitude of public opinion is the first step toward bridging the gap between knowledge and desire.

If one so desires, it is simple enough to keep one's muscular system in good order by a few simple exercises each day. But merely to keep the muscles hard is not an achievement of much value from the standpoint of health and vigor. It is worth while to keep them just wholesomely supple, as they are in a person who does a reasonable amount of walking, or running, or swimming, or paddling. But to put in one's time and take those exercises which harden up the muscles is well-nigh worthless from the standpoint of health. It may be worth while from the standpoint of personal beauty and pride, but that is all. It does not increase our power of digestion, improve circulation or respiration; nor does it increase the depth or length of our sleep. It certainly does not increase the length of our life; it does not alter the health conditions associated with old age; nor does it increase blood pressure. In fact, the development of massive, hard muscles is positively undesirable. People who think they do not need outdoor air, do not need mental relaxation—who think they can work all their waking hours—who think they can do these things with impunity so long as they keep their muscles hard by a little exercise each day—these people are fundamentally and seriously deceiving themselves.

The kind of muscular exercise which works for health, for good digestion, for vigorous, useful life, for longevity, is the frequent contraction of the large muscles of the body, especially in connection with some pleasurable pursuit. It seems as curious to exercise for health as it is to eat for health. What a pathetic thing, to drag one's self from a book in a comfortable corner, to go out

and walk alone, for health! We must devise ways of doing these things together. We must establish social customs relative to spending week-ends, to going out afternoons for games, walks and the like, before we can accomplish the right kind of even muscular exercise. Exercise is not a thing to be taken like a pill—it cannot be picked out of and put into life like a block—it is a part of a whole, it must be associated with our social relations. Just as the flow of the gastric juices and good digestion are aided by waiting on hunger and inhaling the stimulating odors of the meal; just as these things belong to the normal process of digestion, and just as good digestion is difficult without them; so it is with recreation. It is to be associated with social life, with outdoors, with something that is interesting. It is hopelessly ineffectual if we put it by itself, and make of it merely so many muscular contractions.

One pathetic incident showing this foolish faithfulness is that of a Boston mother (she might have been somewhere else, but I chanced to see her in Boston), out walking with her small child whom she was leading by the hand. The mother said, "Take a deep breath, Mary; it is good for you." Such an endeavor to make the simple physiological process a consciously attained thing is harmful, it is out of joint. If Mary had had a sand-pile, or a dog, to play with, she would have taken a good many deep breaths without thinking of it, and she would have been much better off. And we are like Mary. To find and create community bonds that will take us out-of-doors each day—that is what we need. To make exercise an incident and not an end, in order that it may really help us—this is the second step which must be taken in bridging the gap between knowledge and desire.

What are some of the social exercises? Walking, golfing, canoeing, climbing, dancing—I regard the modern movement which is bringing folk-dancing into the schools as of the utmost significance. It is enjoyable—the boys and girls love it. It is something the love of which goes through life. I saw in Providence a short time ago a class of men who had been meeting twice a week to dance by themselves for several years. Their average age was over sixty; and they used such dances as the Highland Fling. This folk-dancing is wholesome exercise—but primarily it is wholesome socially—it fits modern conditions.

What is the relation between exercise and rest? Work is that

at which we must continue, whether interesting or not, whether we are tired or not. It used to be thought that the prime requisite of rest was the use of faculties other than those involved in the labor of the day. But there is such a thing as fatigue which goes deeper than daily work. We can work so hard as to become exhausted—too exhausted for any kind of work. Perhaps this is *will* fatigue. It is coming to be regarded as fundamentally true that rest from such fatigue demands continuity; that, for example, four periods of fifteen minutes each of rest is not the equivalent of one hour's rest; that a man who goes on a vacation and takes half an hour of his business work every day, is doing the same thing as the man who had a horse with a sore back. He kept the saddle on only a few minutes each day, but the sore did not have a chance to heal. Rest periods must be sufficiently consecutive to overcome consecutive fatigue.

New York is already taking this general need of the community for socializing rest and exercise into view. The new Commissioner of Parks in New York, Charles B. Stover, is opening up facilities for two or three times as many people in the parks and playgrounds as were ever before provided. The Citizen's Recreation Committee of that city has published a pamphlet which tells of the recreation facilities provided by the city of New York. It is astonishing, the facilities for camping out, for boating, for excursions, for games, for the general use not only of the parks, but also of the golf-links and tennis-courts. All sorts of things are furnished by the city as such. If one of the chief perils of our times is the peril of opportunity, it is equally true that there has never been presented to us before anything like the facilities for interesting open-air activities as are now available. For example, it is possible to start from almost any point in New York, in half an hour be on your boat on the Hudson River, and in another hour to be on the wild Palisades cooking supper with driftwood—and all with comparatively little expense. Hundreds do it, and our facilities for such outdoor recreation have hardly begun to be used as yet. This open-air custom is fast becoming common.

The supreme battle of life, it seems to me, comes for most of us between thirty-five and forty-five. The momentum of early youth is gone by that time. The physical capital of youth with which most of us started has largely been expended. Most of our

ideals have been seriously altered by experience. We see things in a different light from what we imagined they were as children. The brilliant color of fancy has faded. At this time it is not counsel that is needed—it is some definite thing to turn to, some definite course to take hold of, which we can carry through until poise is re-established; some concrete course of action to which we can hold, blindly if necessary, till the new and larger relation to life and work and society has been established; something that will make for sanity and wholesomeness. It is a kind of intellectual climacteric that is found in men as well as in women. Women, after their younger children have become six or seven years old—women who have devoted themselves to their families intensely—come up to that time and find necessary some readjustment. Then is the time to make for themselves a new relation to the community, or to degenerate. The fundamental thing to do at this time is to keep the whole body keenly alive. Thus the fundamental thing to be sought is sanity, which rests upon a basis of good digestion, good sleep, and a skin that is wholesomely alive and responsive to cold and heat. Now is the time to go out-of-doors and feel the instinctive response to the simple and elemental things of life. The person who goes out-of-doors and feels a blast of cold air on the face, and does not enjoy it, is not on the high level, but on the downward road. The person who still sees that the grass is green and the sky blue, who has simple, definite response of enjoyment to the natural elements, is sane in the sense that I am using the word. This enjoyment of the broader element in exercise is the common test by which we can know ourselves during the time when the youthful ideals are going, and before the larger ideals are established.

These larger ideals involve a new definition of life for ourselves. What is life for? The object of life is to increase life—to live vitally. No other thing is adequate. Any loss of perspective that puts the earning of money, the securing of professional reputation, and that sort of thing, first, which does not give to sleep its place, which does not give to out-of-doors its place, is a distortion, and cannot result in the biggest things nor the best work in life.

It is only lack of perspective that permits us to see our work so close that it seems more important to us than life. Life itself is the true object—full, free and social life—and we need to stand

back from our work and get this true perspective. Some Sunday or some week, when you are free from work, ask yourself what is worth while, and then readjust things. Assign to drudgery its place—if it absorbs all the effort, it makes drudgery of life itself. Assign rest and outdoors to their places; assign to your friends their time; and then live the balanced life. In no other way can we permanently accomplish this but by the establishment of community customs.

We have done away with the contagion of talk about ill health. It remains for us to socialize our recreations, to learn to play in groups. Carry on wholesome social exercise—functions out-of-doors—week-end parties—camping trips—boating—folk-dancing—all that is at the foundation of everything which is sane and simple and worth while. This is the answer to the question—the solution of the problem of bridging the gap between knowing how to be healthy and sane, and being healthy and sane. This is the *vita nuova*, to be reached by socializing out-of-door rest and recreation.

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