

SELECTING SUITABLE CLOTHES FOR CHILDREN

During Infancy

Infants are very susceptible of the impressions of cold; a proper regard, therefore, to a suitable clothing of the body, is imperative to their enjoyment of health. Unfortunately, an opinion is prevalent in society, that the tender child has naturally a great power of generating heat and resisting cold; and from this popular error has arisen the most fatal results. This opinion has been much strengthened by the insidious manner in which cold operates on the frame, the injurious effects not being always manifest during or immediately after its application, so that but too frequently the fatal result is traced to a wrong source, or the infant sinks under the action of an unknown cause.

The power of generating heat in warm-blooded animals is at its minimum at birth, and increases successively to adult age; young animals, instead of being warmer than adults, are generally a degree or two colder, and part with their heat more readily; facts which cannot be too generally known. They show how absurd must be the folly of that system of "hardening" the constitution (to which reference has been before made), which induces the parent to plunge the tender and delicate child into the cold bath at all seasons of the year, and freely expose it to the cold, cutting currents of an easterly wind, with the lightest clothing.

The principles which ought to guide a parent in clothing her infant are as follows:

The material and quantity of the clothes should be such as to preserve a sufficient proportion of warmth to the body, regulated therefore by the season of the year, and the delicacy or strength of the infant's constitution. In effecting this, however, the parent must guard against the too common practice of enveloping the child in innumerable folds of warm clothing, and keeping it constantly confined to very hot and close rooms; thus running into the opposite extreme to that to which I have just alluded: for nothing tends so much to enfeeble the constitution, to induce disease, and render the skin highly susceptible to the impression of cold; and thus to produce those very ailments which it is the chief intention to guard against.

In their make they should be so arranged as to put no restrictions to the free movements of all parts of the child's body; and so loose and easy as to permit the insensible perspiration to have a free exit, instead of being confined to and absorbed by the clothes, and held in contact with the skin, till it gives rise to irritation.

In their quality they should be such as not to irritate the delicate skin of the child. In infancy, therefore, flannel is rather too rough, but is desirable as the child grows older, as it gives a gentle stimulus to the skin, and maintains health.

In its construction the dress should be so simple as to admit of being quickly put on, since dressing is irksome to the infant, causing it to cry, and exciting as much mental irritation as it is capable of feeling. Pins should be wholly dispensed with, their use being hazardous through the carelessness of nurses, and even through the ordinary movements of the infant itself.

The clothing must be changed daily. It is eminently conducive to good health that a complete change of dress should be made every day. If this is not done, washing will, in a great measure, fail in its object, especially in insuring freedom from skin diseases.

During Childhood

The clothing of the child should possess the same properties as that of infancy. It should afford due warmth, be of such materials as do not irritate the skin, and so made as to occasion no unnatural constriction.

In reference to due warmth, it may be well again to repeat, that too little clothing is frequently productive of the most sudden attacks of active disease; and that children who are thus exposed with thin clothing in a climate so variable as ours are the frequent subjects of croup, and other dangerous affections of the air-passages and lungs. On the other hand, it must not be forgotten, that too warm clothing is a source of disease, sometimes even of the same diseases which originate in exposure to cold, and often renders the frame more susceptible of the impressions of cold, especially of cold air taken into the lungs. Regulate the clothing, then, according to the season; resume the winter dress early; lay it aside late; for it is in spring and autumn that the vicissitudes in our climate are greatest, and congestive and inflammatory complaints most common.

With regard to material (as was before observed), the skin will at this age bear flannel next to it; and it is now not only proper, but necessary. It may be put off with advantage during the night, and cotton maybe substituted during the summer, the flannel being resumed early in the autumn. If from very great delicacy of constitution it proves too irritating to the skin, fine fleecy hosiery will in general be easily endured, and will greatly conduce to the preservation of health.

It is highly important that the clothes of the boy should be so made that no restraints shall be put on the movements of the body or limbs, nor injurious pressure made on his waist or chest. All his muscles ought to have full liberty to act, as their free exercise promotes both their growth and activity, and thus insures the regularity and efficiency of the several functions to which these muscles are subservient.

The same remarks apply with equal force to the dress of the girl; and happily, during childhood, at least, no distinction is made in this matter between the sexes. Not so, however, when the girl is about to emerge from this period of life; a system of dress is then adopted which has the most pernicious effects upon her health, and the development of the body, the employment of tight stays, which impede the free and full action of the respiratory organs, being only one of the many restrictions and injurious practices from which in latter years they are thus doomed to suffer so severely.