

How to Keep Well

By Dr. Theodore R. Van Dellen

PSYCHOMOTOR EPILEPSY

Trial of Jack Ruby focused attention on psychomotor epilepsy. We received many letters from readers wanting to know more about this condition and how it differs from other forms of the disease, and protesting the implication that a relationship exists between crime and this disorder.

Epilepsy is a paroxysmal condition precipitated by abnormal electrical discharges in the brain, leading to episodes in which the flow of consciousness is disturbed. Some victims develop convulsions (grand mal); others have momentary blackouts (petit mal). Psychomotor seizures are the third type. The individual is conscious during the attack, at which time he is compelled to perform purposeless acts that are sometimes foolish or harmful.

These include twisting or writhing movements of the extremities or trunk, smacking movements of the lips, or incoherent speech. Some may walk aimlessly or drive a car for no apparent reason. Others pull off the clothes. The attacks may be of short duration, and the victim may carry out the same act each time or there may be variations.

Some persons develop bouts

of temporary insanity lasting days or weeks. The mind is clouded, and the behavior follows an automatic pattern. On coming to, they do not remember what happened. It is here that the Ruby case enters the picture, because a misdemeanor, serious crime, or murder may be committed at this time.

The behavior of the epileptic differs from that of the criminal. The mind is too clouded to make it possible for him to plan a crime. He deals a sudden violent blow to anyone he encounters with anything he picks up on the spot. His action is not premeditated, nor does he use a weapon that he carries for this purpose. His crimes are pointless, without motive, and with no planning. In addition, the individual's abnormal mental condition during the seizure usually is quickly detected and he can be institutionalized before he harms himself or someone else.

TOMORROW: Chronic Infection of Prostate.

THEORETICAL

E. Z. writes: Can overeating bring on a second heart attack?

REPLY

This concept is a theory left over from the days when most heart attacks were called "acute indigestion." The usual cause is blockage of a coronary artery. On the other hand, overeating, overexertion, fatigue, and tenseness may contribute by hastening the process.

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