

MEDICINE

Cancer Runs in Families

► CERTAIN TYPES of cancer show signs of heredity, or of running in a family, a report from the American Cancer Society states. Breast cancer, for example, tends to be found more often in the female relatives of women who have breast cancer than it does in the general population.

Knowledge of this can be helpful in preventing cancer in the other members of the family of a cancer patient, or in having the cancer diagnosed at the earliest time once it has developed.

If one member of a family has had cancer of the stomach, the patient with vague symptoms of indigestion and his physician should be more alert to the possibility of cancer. If one member of the family has had cancer of the rectum, the symptoms of chronic constipation or bleeding from the rectum should send the next member of the family at once for a medical examination.

Almost everyone who has a relative with cancer will at times wonder whether it will be "me too?" Some will wisely consider

the possibility and take the common sense precaution of seeing their doctor regularly for complete examination, and seeing him in between examinations if any symptom develops or if they are just vaguely worried about the possibility. Others, unfortunately, will take a foolish ostrich attitude and refuse even to think of the possibility.

It is understandable that a person who saw a parent or grandparent die of cancer may feel both frightened and hopeless about cancer in himself or herself. But such a person should remember that many advances have been made in cancer fighting. Many, who a generation ago would have died of cancer, today are being saved by early, adequate treatment.

Methods of treatment and of diagnosis have been improved. Lives that cannot be saved are being lengthened and made more comfortable. Knowing this should give courage to fight cancer, not shrink from the thought.

Science News Letter, December 13, 1952

MEDICINE

Plastic Warms Cold Feet

► COLD FEET can be warmed by more than eight degrees Fahrenheit, and blood flow to the feet can be increased by a plastic sleeve worn as a boot.

The results that can be obtained with this simple device are reported by Drs. Kenneth R. Woolling, Edgar V. Allen, Grace M. Roth and Khalil G. Wakim of the Mayo Clinic and Foundation, Rochester, Minn.

This new kind of bedsock consists of: 1. A sterilizable, transparent, plastic inner sleeve with thermoplastic sealed seams; 2. An outer sleeve consisting of two layers of opaque plastic sheeting separated by a space of one inch that contains spun glass for insulation. The entire thing weighs a little over one pound.

The inner sleeve is slipped over the foot like a stocking and then the outer sleeve is applied over the inner. Both sleeves cover the foot and leg as a double layer, high boot coming up to about the middle of the thigh.

The boot achieves its effect by conserving heat in the foot and lower leg through insulation. As the temperature increases, the blood vessels are dilated and more blood flows into the lower leg and foot. It should prove useful, the Mayo scientists suggest, in various diseases of poor circulation, and after operations to prevent thrombosis, or clot, in veins.

It is simple and avoids the danger of burning that goes with devices which warm and increase blood flow by applying heat instead of conserving it.

The person with poor circulation and cold feet, or his doctor, wanting to try the device

can get it under the tradename, Autotherm, from the Micro Institute, Division of Image Transfer, Randolph, Mass. Use of the device to replace the conventional hot pack poultice was reported earlier by Drs. C. L. Cliff and Chilton Crane of Boston. Dr. Woolling and colleagues reported their trial of it at a staff meeting of the Mayo Clinic.

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OPHTHALMOLOGY

Snow Blindness From Reflected Rays

► FRESHLY FALLEN snow shining in the sunlight is a dazzling sight that may make you close your eyes for a minute, squint or reach for last summer's dark glasses.

If you are a skier or mountaineer or if for any reason you are going to be exposed to this dazzle for a long time, you should wear dark glasses to protect your eyes from snow blindness.

This condition, which is sometimes called glacial sunstroke, snow ophthalmia or ophthalmia nivalis, is not caused by the snow, Dr. A. Link Koven of the University of Pennsylvania Graduate Hospital, Philadelphia, explains in a report issued by the U. S. Public Health Service.

Snow blindness is caused, he says, by light rays that may be reflected from snow. It usually occurs at altitudes over 1,000 feet and may occur in overcast weather as well as in bright sunshine.

The patient usually experiences signs of

irritation, and feels as if he has sand under his eyelids, after approximately 10 hours of exposure to the sun. The conjunctiva, which lines the lids and covers the eyeballs, becomes red and swollen. Pains in forehead and photophobia occur. In severe cases, one can see erosions on the cornea. The patient is prevented from opening his eyes because of the violent spasms of the eyelids.

These are the cases, Dr. Koven says, which are referred to inaccurately as "snow blindness," since the patient is prevented from seeing because of the intense spasm and swelling of the lids. When the acute symptoms subside, the patient usually complains of a dazzled condition, later on a sense of failure of the illumination of objects, and also of seeing black or red spots, or even a large central area of darkness. In a few days complete recovery occurs.

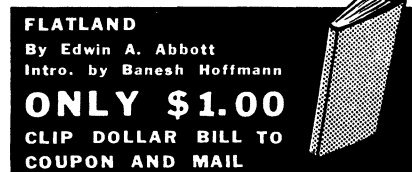
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