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DISEASES THAT OCCUR IN EARLY CHILDHOOD AND INFANCY

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Annotation: In developed countries, SIDS (also called crib death or cot death) accounts for 20 percent of deaths between the ages of one month and one year. SIDS is a categorization rather than an explanation, for the label is given when no reason for death can be found from the infant's medical history or even after autopsy.

Key words : SIDS , respiratory mechanisms, failure .

Most crib deaths occur in the first five months of life and strike at home during the night. They are more common in the winter and in poor social circumstances. A preceding minor respiratory infection is common. This has prompted some investigators to suggest that the underlying defect is the presence of a virus in the bloodstream, leading to instability of cardiac and respiratory mechanisms. Many other hypotheses have been proposed to explain such deaths, however, and it is likely that several different causes may be involved.

Failure to thrive is the term used to describe the condition in which a young child fails to gain weight satisfactorily. Common reasons for such poor weight gain are parental neglect or lack of food. On the other hand, a large number of important gastrointestinal disorders may be responsible, including those associated with vomiting, such as food intolerance or obstruction of the upper bowel by pyloric stenosis; disorders of digestion and absorption, including celiac disease and cystic fibrosis; and bowel infections. Alternatively, the body, because of other serious disorders (*e.g.,* chronic infection or heart or kidney disorder), may fail to use the food that is given and absorbed appropriately.

Malnutrition refers to any disorder brought on by improper diet. In developed countries, the most common form of malnutrition is obesity, the excess accumulation of fat brought on by a diet containing too many calories. Obesity is a major contributor to ill health throughout life. In nonindustrialized nations, by contrast, most malnutrition stems from the lack of food or of particular nutrients. Such deficiency diseases remain an enormous problem. In addition, specific nutritional disturbances are encountered regularly in all populations.

Malnutrition due to inadequate intake of food results in muscle wasting, stunted growth, pallor, increased susceptibility to infection, and fatigue. A special form of malnutrition, in which the intake of calories is adequate but that of protein is not, is referred to as kwashiorkor; it is prevalent in areas of Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Kwashiorkor primarily affects children from six months to five years of age, the onset usually coinciding with the child's being weaned from breast milk (which provides adequate protein) to a diet consisting largely of starchy carbohydrates. The affected children are small, have excess fluid in their tissues, and often have enlarged livers. They have unusual pigmentation of the skin and sparse, reddish hair.

Permanent aftereffects of kwashiorkor, especially on the intellectual functions, are matters of great concern.

Vitamin deficiencies can result in a variety of diseases. Rickets is a disorder secondary to deficiency of vitamin D. The major consequence is bone disease, with defective growth of the epiphyseal cartilage. (This cartilage, present in several bones, especially near the ends of the long bones of the arms and legs, ossifies as a person matures.) Scurvy occurs as a consequence of a deficiency of vitamin C. Clinical manifestations include bone disease, irritability, and bleeding under the skin and mucous membranes. Pellagra is due to a deficiency of niacin and is manifested clinically by diarrhea, dermatitis, and dementia. Riboflavin deficiency results in lesions of the skin and corners of the mouth, with a peculiar smoothing of the tongue. Beriberi is a consequence of thiamine deficiency. The major clinical features often relate to cardiac impairment. Defects in the functioning of the nervous system also are common. Deficiency of vitamin A results in ocular abnormalities, growth retardation, anemia, and dermatitis.

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