

The May

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# American

Magazine



WALTER BEACH HUMPHREY

## Why We Behave Like Idiots

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ACADEMY  
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# The American Magazine

May, 1926

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Vol. CI

## CONTENTS

No. 5

THE FIGHTING POINT. A new serial Illustrations by Stockton Mulford	BEN AMES WILLIAMS	11
EVANS CLIMBED OUT OF HIS PIT ON A SET OF WOODEN BLOCKS	WILLIAM S. DUTTON	16
EDWARD S. EVANS. Pictures in photogravure		17
HARRY EMERSON FOSDICK. Portrait in photogravure		18
THE POWER OF FAITH	EDWARD CLARY ROOT	19
WHY WE BEHAVE LIKE IDIOTS	CLARENCE BUDINGTON KELLAND	20
DETECTIVE HANVEY PAYS A MIDNIGHT CALL. A story Illustrations by William Meade Prince	OCTAVUS ROY COHEN	23
TONY SARG HAS NEVER DONE A STROKE OF WORK IN HIS LIFE!	JOHN MONK SAUNDERS	26
WONDERS OF AUTOMATIC MACHINERY	ROBERT CHANCELLOR	29
ENCHANTED MACHINES. Verse	BERTON BRALEY	29
THE GIRL WHO WANTED TO GROW UP. A story Illustrations by Frances Rogers	DREW HILL	31
GLENN HUNTER MADE HIS DÉBUT IN AN APPLE ORCHARD	MARY B. MULLETT	34
GLENN HUNTER. Picture in photogravure		35
DOROTHY CANFIELD FISHER. Pictures in photogravure		36
WHY DON'T I LIVE SOMEWHERE ELSE?	DOROTHY CANFIELD FISHER	37
"NEVER FLY HIGHER THAN YOU CAN ROOST"	FRANK B. COPLEY	38
WIND! A STAR PERFORMER IN THE DRAMA OF AMERICAN LIFE	STUART MACKENZIE	40
THE GOLDEN CHAMBER. A story Illustrations by Victor C. Anderson	AGNES SLIGH TURNBULL	43
WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT YOUR BLOOD PRESSURE	WILLIAM S. SADLER, M. D.	46
THE WATCH ON THE RIO GRANDE	GEORGE W. GRAY	48
HERE'S WHERE YOUR MONEY GOES!	JOHN T. FLYNN	51
BRUCE FIGHTS TO GIVE OTHERS THE CHANCE HE NEVER HAD	SHERMAN GWINN	52
"EASY MONEY." A story Illustrations by T. K. Hanna	FANNIE KILBOURNE	55
ADAM SAID IT TO EVE—AND IT'S STILL GOING THE ROUNDS	H. I. PHILLIPS	58
IF YOU ASK ME: You don't have to defend it if it's really art	ROBERT QUILLEN	59
THE MOST INTERESTING PLACE IN THE WORLD	E. ALEXANDER POWELL	60
IF THE CHEMIST STEPPED OUT OF YOUR LIFE—	CHARLES LANE CALLEN	64
CUPID AND THE PIG. A story Illustrations by Herman Pfeiffer	NELIA GARDNER WHITE	66
INTERESTING PEOPLE: Martin Johnson	L. L. Huntington	70
Mrs. Edith B. DeCoster	William S. Dutton	71
Harry L. Allison	Charles W. Horn	72
George Messmore and Joseph Damon	Donald MacGregor	73
Mrs. Emily Wakeman Hartley	Nina S. Purdy	74
THE MOST INTERESTING PLACE IN THE WORLD TO ME Prize contest announcement		98
ONCE WHEN I WAS LOST— 1st Prize—I Saved My Life by Fiddling to a Pack of Wolves	L. G.	111
2d Prize—My Dog Guided Rescuers to My Side	R. L. J.	111
3d Prize—I Spent the Night Afloat on a Block of Ice	A. H.	112
THE FAMILY'S MONEY Our Family of Six Had a Two-Months Vacation on \$60	Mrs. J. R. C.	230

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# What You Need To Know About Your Blood Pressure

By William S. Sadler, M. D.

**H**OW can I tell if there is anything wrong with my blood pressure?" That's a question that we medical men have put to us times without number.

And the answer is, that you, yourself, cannot tell.

Even the physician has to resort to mechanical means for determining it. He uses a clever contrivance which registers the pressure in the blood vessels of your arm.

If the result shows much of a variation from normal, he takes perhaps several readings, at different times and under different conditions; for instance, with the patient sitting, standing, and after exercise. He knows that the pressure is not always the same, even in the same person; and he does not want to be misled by any merely temporary variation.

The pressure is registered on a tube containing mercury and is read in millimeters. The average blood pressure for men at twenty years of age is 120 millimeters. The average for women at that age is about 110 millimeters. At any age, the average pressure for women is about ten points below the average for men.

With most people, the blood pressure rises one millimeter for every two years' increase of age. That is, if it is 120 when a man is twenty, it may be 130 when he is forty, and 140 when he is sixty.

Your pressure may vary somewhat from the average for your age and still not be abnormal. The range of this variation is about 30 points; that is, your pressure may be 15 millimeters above, or below, the average and still be normal in your case.

I have noticed with people who live moderately and are free from the nervous influences which contribute to high blood pressure, the pressure does not go up the usual one point for every two years' increase in age. In fact, I have seen many persons with a blood pressure of 115, or 120, that remained stationary for ten or fifteen years.

Aside from the variations due to age and to sex, there are others which may be regarded as normal. Obesity, temperament, time of day, digestion, muscularity, exercise, fatigue, posture, sleep, excitement, fear, and even the weather; all these conditions may have a perceptible effect on blood pressure. But these effects either disappear with a change in external conditions, or can be relieved without much difficulty.

Of course a chronic tendency to high blood pressure is not a good thing. It is directly, or indirectly, responsible for numerous minor ailments, and may eventually lead to grave physical catastrophe.

Persistent high pressure is intimately connected with such serious disorders as chronic headaches, apoplexy, heart failure,

Bright's disease, insomnia, digestive troubles, chronic congestion, and even certain forms of mental disorder.

However, it is with the *causes* of high blood pressure that we should be most concerned. For if we avoid, or remove, the causes, we shall escape the results.

There is a popular belief that high blood pressure is largely the result of arteriosclerosis—hardening of the arteries. It is true that the two are often associated. But medical men are inclined to think that the popular belief has put the cart before the horse.

Half the cases of arteriosclerosis show very little, if any, elevation in the blood pressure. But an abnormally high pressure, over a long period of years, does harden the arteries.

The thing seems to come about in this way: As the result of certain habits of living, or of poisons in the circulation, the blood pressure is increased. This increased pressure affects the sensitive lining of the blood vessels. A low-grade inflammation is set up, causing a thickening of the blood vessels' walls. If this inflammatory process is kept up indefinitely, sooner or later calcium salts (lime) are deposited in the walls of the arteries. This thickening of the walls goes on, until finally we have a typical case of arteriosclerosis.

**N**OW let us go back and search for the causes of high blood pressure itself.

This is a subject on which even the doctors disagree. Therefore, in order to be on the safe side, I shall include practically all the influences which the various authorities believe to be responsible for high pressure, and group them under six heads:

Drugs	Exposure
Diet	Overwork
Toxins	Mental states

The habitual use of any drug may contribute, directly or indirectly, to the increasing of blood pressure. Some authorities believe that drug habits go in pairs. For example, since cocaine *raises* the blood pressure and *produces* tension, it paves the way for the morphine habit; because morphine *lowers* the pressure and *lessens* tension.

I regard the *whole drug family* as under suspicion in connection with blood pressure and high tension. There are, moreover, other reasons—connected with the nervous system, digestion, liver and kidneys—why people should avoid the habitual use of drugs.

If you are sick enough to need a drug, you are sick enough to have a doctor. Consequently, if you use these chemical agencies, do so only under medical direction.

Alcohol, for instance, is a great deceiver. It makes you think you are warm when

you are cold, strong when you are weak, rich when you are poor. Its immediate effect is to lower the blood pressure. But its final effect, if used continuously, is to contribute to the hardening of the arteries, especially in the brain, liver, and kidneys. Its real effects are therefore the very opposite of its apparent effects.

**N**EXT comes the question of diet. In the average case of high blood pressure, I always suspect *overeating* as the cause, until I am convinced that it is not responsible. It is probably the greatest mischief-maker in this connection. Eating too much meat is often the cause of the trouble, but other errors in diet may be the guilty factor.

I have not found that a purely vegetarian diet has any particular advantage over a *restricted* meat diet with plenty of fruits and green vegetables. But in some cases it may be wise to discontinue entirely, for some months at any rate, the use of meat, and also to restrict the use of eggs and bread. There is one sure thing: the victim of high blood pressure should not *overeat*, even of the simplest foods.

Recently, a man died of high blood pressure, Bright's disease, and allied causes, at forty-three years of age. His wife wanted to know what was really the cause of his death; and after I had enumerated many of his habits, and the pus infections in his body which he had carried for years in spite of medical instructions, I said: "In addition to these influences, it was three square meals a day that killed your husband. If you want his monument to be a warning to future generations, you can enumerate abscessed teeth, infected tonsils, influenza, etc.; but don't forget to put on 'three square meals a day'."

A few years ago a mastication fad swept over the country. It was called Fletcherizing. Without going into its merits or demerits, Fletcherizing would be a good practice for people with high blood pressure who are addicted to overeating. If we take time to chew our food thoroughly, we won't have time to eat so much of it! Moreover, thorough mastication satisfies the appetite with a less amount of food.

Some authorities believe that the fiery condiments in highly seasoned food contribute to high blood pressure, hardening of the arteries, and other ills. This may, or may not, be true. But condiments do tickle the palate, and thus indirectly cause us to overeat. And that is one of the common causes of high blood pressure.

Some students of this question of blood pressure believe it may be caused by auto-intoxication, due to the products of faulty digestion being allowed to accumulate within the body.

There are two schools of thought in



regard to possible auto-intoxication from constipation. However, this matter may be decided in the future. But to be on the safe side now, if I had high blood pressure I would see that I had two good bowel movements every day. I would also try to keep the urine free of indican.

Now we come to exposure and overwork as causes of high blood pressure.

There is no doubt that our modern strenuous life, both physical and mental, is a great factor in this connection. To drive the mind and the body, under the lash of nervous ambition, is bound to result disastrously for the average person.

Ceaseless and restless activity, feverish haste and striving, fierce competition, social rivalry—the whole picture of modern society and business is directly responsible for high blood pressure.

Exposure to cold and to other harmful influences, if persisted in for years, also contributes to it. Exposure in connection with habitual overwork is doubly bad.

We hear a good deal nowadays about focal infections, such as diseased teeth or tonsils. Harmful microbes generate toxins, or poisons; and these, after being taken up by the circulation, go all through the body. These microbial poisons are the cause of many cases of high blood pressure.

This is true, not only of chronic infections, but also of more acute ones, such as those connected with colds, influenza, and so on.

**M**ANY a man has gone to bed with an attack of the "flu." He aches all over, has more or less fever, and is suffering from a general infection. He is a sick man; but his sickness is seemingly not severe enough to keep him at home more than a day or two. So he gets up and goes back to work. He may be two or three weeks actually getting over this attack; all because he was not willing to stay in bed a few days until he got well.

Sometimes, following an experience of this kind, albumin appears in the urine and the kidneys are seriously affected. Certain individuals go on for years, not knowing that they were more or less permanently crippled in health at the time they had the flu, until, perhaps, they apply for more life insurance, and are turned down by the examiner because of blood pressure, kidney trouble, and other serious conditions.

If you want to escape the danger from disease toxins of any kind, you will do well to observe this rule: Any ailment that is accompanied by fever should be taken seriously.

If, for example, you have a cold and have no fever, there is perhaps no great danger to you in being up and around the house. Except for the menace you are to others by spreading the contagion, you might even go to your work. But if you have a cold accompanied by fever—stop everything and go to bed! Send for the doctor; and stay in bed until you are

really well. After an attack of flu, or of a cold with fever, have the urine tested to make sure that the kidneys have come through all right.

Most of you know that rheumatism, sciatica, and neuralgia are very often caused by infection from bad teeth, tonsils, and other so-called focal infections. These infections, when allowed to continue for years, are often the cause of high blood pressure and hardened arteries.

We come now to the last group of causes. For many years I have studied the connection between mental states and high blood pressure; and I have found ample proof that fear, worry, and all their psychic cousins are able to raise blood pressure to a point resulting in real injury to health; and that also, by this increase in blood pressure, these mental states create a demand for the use of highly injurious drugs.

It is true that, in some cases, these mental states cause the opposite effect. I

more or less of a complete readjustment of the circulatory mechanism.

A worried city missionary, troubled with sleeplessness, rapidly losing appetite, also weight, had a blood pressure of about 165 mm. She seemed to be free from everything that would lead to the mental states of fear and anxiety; but careful inquiry disclosed the fact that she worried considerably over the subjects of her missionary endeavor.

At first she resented our efforts to admonish her on this point; but one day she was told the story of the simple-minded boy, who insisted on carrying two bushels of chop feed on his own shoulders while riding horseback. On being asked why he did so, he replied, "Well, I reckon if the horse can carry me I ought to be willing to carry the feed."

She went home and began to think matters over, finally arriving at this conclusion: "If Christ's death on the cross can't save sinners, no amount of anxiety or worry on my part can effect their salvation."

She appeared at the office the following day, asserting that she had learned the meaning of such Scriptures as, "Casting all your care upon Him, for He careth for you," and, "Come unto Me all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Strange to report, the taking of her blood pressure showed that it had fallen to 140, and it subsequently went down to about 135.

**T**HERE is a vicious circle associated with high blood pressure. For instance, suppose it is caused by drugs. The pressure which results from taking these drugs often leads the victim to take more drugs. Or, if the pressure is caused by mental states, the patient may resort to drugs for temporary relief to his disordered nerves.

Religion, as a state of mind, often exerts a salutary influence. A woman with a blood pressure of 160 was converted at a revival meeting—and her pressure went down to 140. An unfaithful husband, whose blood pressure had been running from 170 to 180, showed a reduction to 140 after a professed conversion and reconciliation with his wife.

Let me make it clear that these were cases of functional high pressure. In a case of organic high tension—due to organic disease—a mere change in the patient's state of mind would not suffice to lower the blood pressure.

Now comes the problem of what shall be done with victims of high pressure. My policy is to advise rest and medical treatment for a few weeks or months, to see whether it is possible to bring the blood pressure down. A man or woman with a blood pressure of 200 or above should, in my opinion, be put to bed for a few weeks on a buttermilk diet, or one of skimmed milk and buttermilk. If there is a tendency to (Continued on page 212)

## His Blood Pressure Was The Barometer of His Courtship

"I HAD one case of a young man whose blood pressure was 160—sometimes even higher," says Doctor Sadler. "I found that he had been jilted by his sweetheart. When this lovers' quarrel was patched up, his blood pressure went down to 135—and it probably would have gone lower but for the fact that he smoked a great deal. This, no doubt, helped to keep his pressure more or less permanently above normal.

"I could cite any number of cases where emotional disturbances, of some sort or other, directly affected the blood pressure. The lesson should be evident to anyone: try to avoid these mental states of fear, worry, and emotional strain."

have seen many persons who, as a result of chronic worry and prolonged anxiety, have an abnormally low pressure, accompanied with persistent depression, fatigue, and so on.

**A** FEW years ago I had an opportunity to observe a series of rapid and unusual fluctuations in blood pressure on the part of a nervous and semi-hysterical young woman. Pressures taken just before and just after the receipt of some trifling bad news exhibited a difference of over 50 mm. There was, at times, a difference of 20 to 30 mm. during a single observation, as a result of purely emotional disturbances. Such a high degree of instability as a result of mental influence is not at all uncommon.

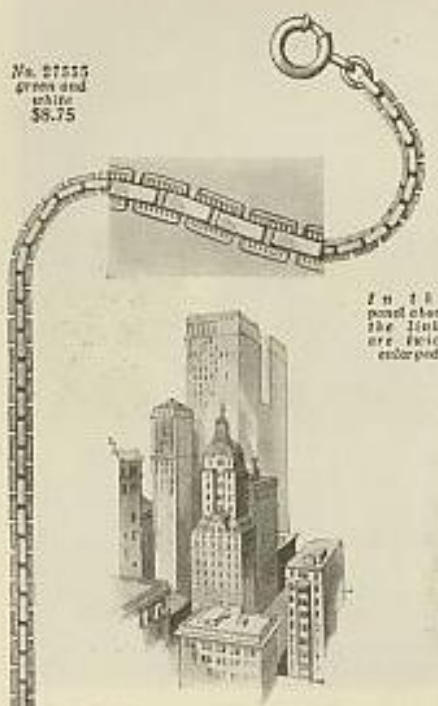
Sudden excitement, intense anger, and keen disappointment, instantly cause changes in blood pressure varying from 10 to 25 per cent. So it appears that the highly emotional person is constantly altering his blood pressure, necessitating



# What You Need to Know About Your Blood Pressure

(Continued from page 47)

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constipation. I usually add fruit and vegetables once a day to the diet.

It sometimes develops that high blood pressure is due to several factors: to the mental state, the diet, as well as to the arterial condition. Now, when we have removed all of the causes of high blood pressure except the arterial condition, we have done about all we can.

It is advisable for people with high blood pressure to restrict themselves to two meals a day. I also advise them to be moderate in the use of meat, eggs, and bread. But the *quantity* of the food is of more importance than the kind. The *main* thing is not to overeat.

If people suffering with high blood pressure are much over-weight, they must reduce. This should be done gradually by a reduction in the amount of food from week to week until the proper weight is arrived at.

Personally, I think it does most of these high pressure cases little harm to go about their usual activities; at least part of the time, after they have had a complete rest of a few weeks. Generally speaking, they live about as long, if they exercise judgment and are discreet in their conduct, and go about their business calmly, as they would if they were to lead a life hemmed in by restrictions.

It goes without saying that the victims of high blood pressure must avoid extremes of conduct; especially must they not run for street cars, or indulge in other sudden spurts of muscular exercise. They also must be careful not to indulge in sudden explosions of anger.

We must not overlook the fact that some people have carried a relatively high pressure all their lives. They belong to high pressure families; and observation discloses that the pressure does not go up very much, even with the passing of years.

The reader should therefore come clearly to understand that a slight elevation in pressure is not cause for undue alarm, and that many times, with but little change in one's habits of living, a little rest and recreation, the pressure will come down to normal.

**T**HERE is a striking difference between high blood pressure and low blood pressure. People with abnormally low blood pressure have so many symptoms that they are pretty sure to do something about it. Whereas, people with high blood pressure often have no symptoms and feel generally fit. That's the reason why I advocate a yearly health audit—which reports to you just how your blood pressure stands.

There are certain simple and natural procedures which are exceedingly useful in lowering high blood pressure, and which do not have undesirable and depressing effects. But no remedy is of much value if the high pressure causes are allowed to continue. Among the valuable agencies for combating *moderately* high blood pressure, may be mentioned:

1. **EXERCISE:** Active physical exercise, to the point of gentle perspiration, brings a large amount of blood to the muscles. It dilates the vessels of the skin, producing a ruddy glow, just as alcohol does. But the dilation from exercise is more permanent, and is not followed by an undesirable reaction. All forms of exercise, preferably in the open air with the clothing loose and free, should be systematically utilized by all *moderately* high blood pressure victims. Those suffering from *very* high pressure should exercise *only as directed by their physicians*.

2. **MASSAGE AND FRICTION:** In the case of feeble patients—bedridden patients who cannot stand vigorous exercise, and those who have weak hearts or hardened arteries (which conditions make it unsafe for them to take the more vigorous exercise and baths)—massage and friction are useful.

3. **BATHS:** The neutral bath lowers pressure by dilating the vessels of the skin and quieting the heart. Try it sometime when you are restless, nervous, fretful, can't sleep, and your head is throbbing. Take a neutral bath; that is, in water with a temperature of from 96° to 98° F. The cold bath, likewise, by the vigorous reaction which follows it, temporarily lowers the blood pressure. Warm baths must be continued for a number of minutes, in order to lower the blood pressure; the neutral bath from fifteen to forty-five minutes; but cold baths must be *short*, in order to lower the blood pressure. The salt bath or salt rub is doubly useful.

4. **THE SUN BATH,** if properly taken, is of great value in relieving high pressure, as it not only diverts blood to the skin, but the "sunburn" is a sort of physiological inflammation which causes the blood to circulate freely in the skin for days following exposure to the sun's rays. Always keep the head cool when taking sun baths.

5. **NATURAL SLEEP AND REST,** directly and indirectly, tend to lower the blood pressure. Why should we resort to the unnatural agencies of harmful, habit-producing drugs in order to relieve the high pressure tension and the nervous restlessness of the age? Let us reform the diet, set the mind at rest, eliminate all high pressure causes, and then, in times of temporary high pressure and unpleasant tension, resort to exercise and simple baths.

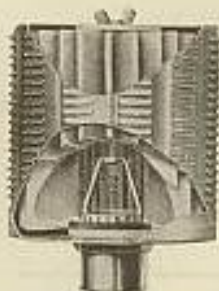
6. **DIETETIC SIMPLICITY.** Discard the strong spices and condiments. In the battle against high pressure, learn to enjoy the varied and *natural* food flavors.

Vegetables, grains, fruits, and nuts, do not contain substances which excite high pressure, unless such foods as nuts and legumes are taken in too large quantities.

Good, normal digestion, in which food is not allowed to remain too long in any one part of the digestive tract, contributes to keeping the blood pressure normal, by preventing the generation of possible high pressure toxins as the result of indigestion.

7. **MENTAL FACTORS IN LOWERING**





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**PRESSURE:** Cheerfulness is essential to good digestion; it also promotes the circulation of the blood by its influence over the vasomotor nerves, and thus indirectly influences the blood pressure. Self-control is the keynote of success in controlling blood pressure.

It may be well to call attention to a number of false methods and dangerous practices which are sometimes resorted to in an effort to lower the blood pressure.

Morphine is resorted to not only for the purpose of easing pain, but also as a means of securing relaxation and sleep. Alcohol, we know, is frequently taken in order to lower blood pressure and to relieve nervous tension. This it does temporarily, but in the end it serves to harden the arteries and eventually contributes to raising blood pressure.

Likewise, the bromides and headache powders, while they relax the nerves and lessen tension for a season, are deceivers when it comes to bringing about permanent relief.

**TO THOSE** who are supposedly suffering from abnormally low pressure, I say this: If your heart is sound, and you are filled with energy, don't worry over your low pressure. You probably belong to a low pressure family, and you should look upon it as a health asset, not as a disease liability.

Ceasing to worry not only serves to reduce blood pressure—in cases where the high tension is wholly or partially due to psychic causes—but a change in the mental state is sometimes able to raise the blood pressure in certain cases of neurasthenia or so-called nervous exhaustion.

Nervous prostration is one of nature's ways of preventing certain high-strung people from actually "blowing up." Nature removes the pendulum and allows them to run down, thus preventing the snapping of the constitutional mainspring. Neurasthenics complain of being "all run down," and that simply means that they were previously "all wound up."

We recently had a chronic neurasthenic with blood pressure running from 95 to 100 mm. We finally convinced him that he was going to get well. He went to work in earnest at his simple treatments; actually forgot about his vague sensations and wandering pains; began to eat heartily, to sleep well, and soon was rapidly gaining. Meanwhile, his blood pressure had slowly climbed up to 115 mm.—practically normal—while his distressing morning headaches almost entirely disappeared.

I believe that low blood pressure, provided the heart is sound, is a desirable thing to have as one approaches old age. I know that many persons with blood pressure down to 110, and sometimes lower, are in excellent health and possessed of abundant vigor.

Not long ago, an insurance company made a report covering three thousand of its policy holders, ranging in age from sixteen to sixty years, whose blood pressure was 100 or less! But instead of this

low blood pressure being an evidence of disease, this group of three thousand exhibited only about one third of the expected mortality as shown by tables prepared from the general American population.

After years of the high pressure life, it often develops that the heart succumbs. The blood pump fails in its long struggle to force the nourishing blood to the tissues through the contracted blood vessels. When the heart gives out in the high pressure battle, then we get what is termed "secondary low pressure."

Now it must be apparent that in such cases as these we must resort to the judicious use of agents which have a tendency to strengthen the heart and otherwise to raise the blood pressure. Fortunately we have in nature's storehouse many agencies which may be effectively employed to raise low blood pressure, without having to resort to the use of dangerous drugs.

1. Active exercise (before the appearance of perspiration).

2. Deep massage of the abdomen, or a bandage applied to the abdomen.

3. Ice bag to the heart (fifteen minutes at a time), in order to stimulate and invigorate that organ.

4. Cold baths (moderately long), which by contracting the blood vessels of the skin, drive the blood to the internal organs.

5. Copious water drinking and large enemas, which add to the blood volume for the time being.

6. Very short hot baths temporarily raise the blood pressure. Deep breathing, and other forms of exercise, are also of value, while the abdominal supporter in certain cases is also helpful.

**IT MUST** be clear to anyone that the best policy for any man or woman who is above twenty-five years of age is to have an annual medical inspection.

The time has come for doctors, on the one hand, to give serious attention to the examination of all well persons who apply to them for counsel. On the other hand, people should be educated to see a physician once a year, in order to have such simple tests as blood examination, urine analysis, blood pressure observation, and many other points that may be in need of attention. The thoroughness of the examination, of course, should depend much on the age and general condition of the patient; but at least these tests, which are so essential to the detection of those insidious diseases of old age, should be made. Most of these degenerative or old-age diseases, which are associated with high blood pressure, are largely *symptomless*; but the examination of urine and blood pressure tests would serve to show the early presence of these disorders.

I firmly believe that, in some future generation, whenever a person dies under fifty years of age, a coroner's inquest will be held to fix the responsibility for his untimely demise.

"THE fact that you don't sleep does not mean that you've bought a ticket for an insane asylum," says Dr. William S. Sadler in "Seven Causes of Sleeplessness." "It is the worry over losing sleep that gets you." In this valuable health article, which you will read next month, many popular fallacies in regard to sleep are brushed aside, and sufferers from insomnia are told how they can successfully woo "Nature's sweet restorer."