

ENDOGENOUS DEPRESSION—A POSSIBLE CLUE TO THE UNDERLYING BIOCHEMICAL DISORDER

DEAR SIR,

Since 1959 I have been under continual treatment by psychiatrists. It is only inside the last few months that I have realized the disorder I suffer from is called "endogenous depression".

One of the striking features of my illness has been an abnormal sleep pattern. My mind has been most alert at night-time up to 2 a.m., sometimes later, and in the morning I could sleep up to 12 noon. It occurred to me that something might be wrong with the secretion rate of aldosterone, since it has normally a diurnal variation. In the light of the evidence that the liberation of aldosterone is under the influence of a cerebral aldosterone-stimulating hormone, and also unquestionably under the influence of ACTH, I was led to the idea that stress may be associated with the liberation of aldosterone. This idea is strengthened by my belief, both from personal experience and from accounts of fellow-patients, that endogenous depression is a chronic protracted stress phenomenon. My theory is that if stress is sufficiently prolonged, nibbling and unrelenting, there comes a time when

the zona glomerulosa can no longer respond with sufficient aldosterone, and the patient begins to suffer from hypo-aldosteronism—expressing itself in the clinical picture of "endogenous depression". The glomerulosa cells become exhausted, as it were, and the pathology of the adrenal becomes similar to that of the pancreas when the islet cells are excessively stimulated.

As the function of aldosterone is to conserve sodium, a few months ago I began treating myself with sodium chloride solution. My sleep pattern changed quickly: I now go to sleep early and wake up in the morning around 7.30 a.m. feeling refreshed energetic and cheerful. As the solution is unpleasant to the palate I have tried giving it up from time to time, and invariably my sleep pattern has altered to the abnormal form. I feel that to keep well I must continue taking salt. I take one level teaspoonful in about $\frac{1}{2}$ pint of water five or six times daily.

Perhaps this treatment would be worth a trial on a larger scale.

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