

Book reviews

Help for your Aching Back. By HARVEY P. KOPELL. 1972. Pp. 109. Wolfe, London (£1.50)

This is a book for the patient to buy and one that can be thoroughly recommended. The style is clear and readable, and the message set out in an interesting manner. There is a great deal on what the back is and a proper warning about back pain not always arising in the back. The section on treatment is set out in a noncontroversial manner, only remarkable for some of the omissions. Treatment is almost entirely conceived as a series of exercises to strengthen back and thigh muscles and to improve posture. There are brief references to surgery and manipulation and traction but none to spinal supports. There is a final chapter on sexual activity in the presence of low back trouble which is useful if only in that it recognizes that there can be a problem. It starts 'Many doctors shy away from discussing the subject of sexual activity and low back derangement', and it is clear that Dr. Kopell also shares this shyness and has difficulty in 'calling a spade a spade'. But within the limits it sets itself, those of informing the patient about acute, chronic, or recurrent low back pain, this is a useful book which patients will appreciate.

A. ST. J. DIXON

Etude sur l'ostéolathyrisme. By S. ORLOFF. 1970. Pp. 159, 32 figs. Éditions Arscia, Brussels. (Belg. Frs 310)

The seeds of the sweet pea, *lathyrus odoratus*, and related vetches contain toxins, chiefly β -amino-propionitrile (BAPN) which causes paraparesis in man and large herbivores (neurolethyrism), and peculiar skeletal malformations in chick embryos and small laboratory animals (osteolathyrism). The latter disorder resembles in many ways the inherited connective tissue abnormality in man, Marfan's syndrome, with hypermobility and dislocation of joints, hyperplasia of muscles, aneurysms of vessels, and subluxation of epiphyses. On this account it has long been of interest in rheumatology, especially since it has become known that both conditions seem to reflect a widespread injury to collagen. Dr. Orloff reviews the nature of collagen, its chemistry and physical properties, and its transition from the soluble to the polymeric forms on which its fibre strength depends. He shows how these processes are interfered with by BAPN and has added extensive work of his own on BAPN-poisoned chick embryos, comparing the fragility of collagenous tissues, estimated by the somewhat gruesome technique of seeing what force is necessary to pull the chick's head off, with the amount and properties of the neutral soluble collagen which can be subsequently extracted. Fragility and neutral soluble collagen are roughly proportional. Surprisingly, the damage to the embryo is reversible if the toxin is withdrawn. Some of the properties of BAPN

in preventing collagen polymerization can be reproduced in solutions of collagen *in vitro*. Incubating embryos at sub-normal temperatures partly inhibits the BAPN effect. The toxin is not itself incorporated into the disordered collagen molecule. It seems to act as a rapid stimulant to the formation of excessive amounts of neutral soluble collagen at the expense of the fibrous form. This monograph contains extensive supporting data and 138 references

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Textbook of Orthopaedic Medicine Vol. 2. Treatment by Manipulation, Massage, and Injection. By J. CYRIAX. 8th edition, 1971. Pp. 432, 149 figs. Baillière Tindall, London (£4.00)

This is a well-illustrated handbook of those massage, injection, and manipulation techniques which the author has found of value, and therefore contains much information which will be useful to both physiotherapist and doctor. Whilst acknowledging the effectiveness of many of his procedures, one has difficulty in accepting without question the theoretical basis on which he claims they are based. He considers that nearly all back pain is discogenic in origin, and claims that his manipulative procedures are aimed at putting back the displaced fragment of annulus. He rightly stresses the importance of making a careful diagnosis before performing the various procedures outlined. One also has to say that it is a subject that cannot be learnt solely from a book but requires demonstration and practice. Some of the procedures should be carried out with caution by the inexperienced; for example, when forced cervical rotation is specifically advised for advanced osteoarthritis and ankylosing spondylitis. In recent years an increasing number of physiotherapists have been practising the oscillatory techniques advocated by Maitland, and one is pleased that Dr. Cyriax gives them his qualified support.

In this book, alongside his manipulative techniques, the author also repeatedly stresses the value of deep transverse frictions and shows by illustrations where they can be usefully applied. He claims that adhesions are broken down and mobility restored between muscle fibres. The same techniques are advocated for certain acute and chronic ligament strains and also for tenosynovitis, in which he thinks that one is able to smooth the roughened gliding surfaces, although this is difficult to visualize. The book also includes a section on sclerosant therapy by Dr. Barbor. This is a technique by which a solution containing phenol and dextrose is injected into ligaments. It is said to prevent recurrent disc protrusion, and even to stabilize the sacroiliac and spondylo-lythetic joints. This seems an ambitious claim and so far as one knows is as yet unproven.

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