

Perspective



The Great American Neurosis

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IT IS ABOUT TIME someone said an unkind word about the great American neurosis that has swept across the country like an ancient plague. It has hit businessmen particularly hard. This neurosis is born of the false notion that hard work is killing us and causing heart attacks. Have you forgotten that we work 8 hours or less a day and a 35- or 40-hour week whereas it used to be a 6-day week and nothing less than 48 hours.

Businessmen have the neurosis in particularly violent form. Hardly an issue of a business magazine fails to remind the poor tired frantic businessman that the tempo of his life is killing him. We feel so sorry for ourselves that instead of saying good-bye when we part, we now say, "Take it easy." This is in some respects a wonderful thing. It makes our wives feel sorry for us, it makes us feel sorry for ourselves (which is even better), and it makes us take more time off and longer vacations. So far so good, but it also worries most businessmen so that they work with mental brakes set against their work and in mortal terror of a heart attack. They are afraid to live for fear of dying.

Let's do away with this nonsense and take our vacations and time off because we like vacations and time off—not because we're afraid we'll drop dead if we don't.

The impression that heart attacks occur more frequently among businessmen is not born out by careful statistical studies. Arthur Master, an outstanding cardiologist, has shown convincingly that there is no clear predilection for any particular group. Indeed he has shown that the occurrence of heart attacks runs parallel with the population distribution of the various occupational groups.

It is becoming increasingly evident that the real culprit is the push button civilization which our businessmen have created. With the bountiful blessings of labor saving devices our ex-college athlete can sit all day long, doing little that is more strenuous than answering the telephone, walking to the men's room, and reading the newspaper. His thrice daily escape is found in eating fine groceries and while he grows fatter, his heart, muscles and glands degenerate and stagnate as he drives home from work with power steering. If this is the millenium then all the basic principles of biology and human physiology are a fraud.

Paul D. White, regarded by many as the greatest living cardiologist, says this:

"It is the belief of many of us today that over-eating is the most important faulty way of life in this country today. Malnutrition and infection have given way to over-nutrition and the ills that seem to accompany it: hypertension, diabetes, and increased coronary heart disease. A good program of regular exercise of almost any sort (walking a few miles a day may suffice), of the reduction of overweight and avoidance of over-nutrition, and a return in part at least to the more rugged positive virtues of our ancestors—the cultivation not only of courage, patience, and optimism, but also of good work (even on Saturdays) may do more for our future health and happiness than all the new medicines or new operations in the world. As a worker in a special field, I believe that all this applies with maximum force to the problem of diseases of the heart and blood vessels."

(From a paper delivered at the recent American Association of Cereal Chemists meeting)