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HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

NOTE FOR PUBLICATION

Subject: "Lighting the Home for Eye Comfort." Information approved by the Bureau of Home Economics, U.S.D.A.

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"Poorly lighted houses spoil many good dispositions in this world," the housing specialist up in New York State once said to me.

I asked her what she meant. It had never occurred to me that lights had anything to do with dispositions.

"Did it ever occur to you," she asked, "that chronic grouches, grumbling husbands and cross wives, to say nothing of complaining aunts and other such household pests may be suffering from eyestrain and not knowing what the trouble is? When people are uncomfortable without knowing why, they naturally feel annoyed and irritable."

She went on to say that in her opinion poor dispositions and even poor digestions are often caused by bad lighting arrangements at home. She told me about a country home where she had been visiting. A pleasant home it was in most respects -- well-built, attractive, nicely furnished with beautiful surroundings. At first glance it seemed an ideal home for the five members of the Jones family who lived there. Unfortunately, however, no one had thought of arranging the lights throughout the house for comfort and convenience. Each room had been provided with just one central light in the middle of the ceiling. No thought had been given to placing the lights to suit the needs of the family.

There was the living room, for example, where the family gathered in the evening. A nice spacious room with a big fireplace. Plenty of comfortable chairs. Tables nearby to hold magazines. Bookshelves handy all filled with books. A smoking stand for the man of the house near his favorite arm chair. A mending basket near Mrs. Jones' chair. And a large table over in one corner for the children to use for their home studies. Doesn't that sound cozy and comfortable?

But something was wrong. Mr. Jones said he didn't enjoy reading as he used to when he was younger. He preferred going up to town to the club in the evening. The children complained that they disliked doing their lessons at home. And Mrs. Jones said she had given up mending or reading in the evening because it always gave her a headache.

What was the cause of it all?

"Wrong lighting," said the specialist.

That solitary light hanging from the ceiling was inadequate for the needs of the family. When the children sat at that table in the corner the light was either in their eyes or else it threw a shadow on their work. No wonder arithmetic problems seemed hard and geography lessons annoying. There was not enough light for them to see even the maps comfortably. As for Mr. Jones, no wonder he had given up his evening reading and no wonder his wife had forsaken her mending.

The lighting in the rest of the house was not much better. There seemed to be the same trouble in most of the rooms -- too much light in one spot and not enough in the rest of the room. In the kitchen a single bulb dangling from the center of the ceiling caused a glare and yet did not give enough illumination where it was needed, in such places as the sink, the work table and the stove. Upstairs in the bedrooms light streamed into the eyes of anyone lying down, yet the room in general seemed dimly lighted and it was impossible to see clearly in any mirror. The same was true of the bathroom where Mr. Jones declared he could never see to shave, no matter how bright a bulb he put in.

Both gloom and glare, the specialist told me, are enemies of eye comfort in the home. A few simple changes in lighting arrangements would do away with strain from these two causes and would make the Jones' house and many others much more comfortable.

"Gracious," I thought to myself when I heard that story, "no telling but what Uncle Ebenezer might have turned into a grouch long ago if he hadn't had that convenient little lamp near his chair to provide just the right light for his checker and chess table."

The longer I live the more ways I learn of making the household happy and contented. Kind words and good deeds were advocated when I was a child. Nowadays, specialists are preaching correct food and proper lighting. Well, I believe in both the old and the new methods. The golden rule still makes for peace on earth and good will. So also do restful lights, extra plugs for lamps, shaded bulbs to prevent glare, concentrated light where it is needed and pleasantly diffused light elsewhere.

First let's consider this matter of glare which has such a bad effect on eyes. To prevent it, the source of light, that very bright spot of electricity, gas or other illumination, should be concealed. Clear glass globes can be replaced by frosted ones which diffuse the light. Other successful ways of preventing glare are indirect lighting and lamp shades to cover bulbs. If a diffused soft light is desired use an overhead fixture that directs the light at the ceiling. For concentrated light, use a fixture that directs the light downward to the place where the light is needed. At working or reading centers, such as the desk, the sewing table or the reading chair, arrange to have well-shaded lamps placed nearby at the left. The shades should be so fitted that the light is cast on the book or work rather than in the worker's eyes.

The best lighting arrangements are planned to suit the purpose they are to serve. Correct lighting for the living room will be different from that in the dining room or kitchen. For special work like cooking, white light generally diffused about the room to prevent shadows is most useful and comfortable. Using only a single bright light for reading or sewing is not recommended since the eyes may be strained by the contrast between the bright spot and the corresponding darkness. Two lights, one for general illumination and one concentrated are best.

What about correct light for the living room? Because this room is used for varied activities requiring both bright and restful light, overhead fixtures as well as low lamps are generally useful. If the central fixture is placed high enough, it is not likely to cast annoying shadows. Sometimes, however, overhead fixtures can be entirely dispensed with and floor and table lamps used instead. In general lamps give a more flattering and more comfortable light, because the glare is softened with colored shades and the light placed only where it is needed.

The dining room, on the other hand, needs a central fixture. Here the table is the object of interest and the light should be directed on it but adjusted to avoid the eyes of the persons seated.

For successful lighting in the bedroom, illumination for mirrors and dressing tables and for the bedside should be considered. Dressing table lights should be directed on the person before the mirror rather than toward the mirror, if there is to be a clear reflection. That is why wall lamps beside the mirror are good or lamps standing on the bureau or dressing table. That is also why mirrors placed between windows give the clearest reflection in the daytime. The light, you see, falls on the user rather than on the mirror. For the bedside, little lamps standing on a small bedside table are convenient -- easy to reach in the darkness and easy to read by.

In the bathroom, the mirror is again the feature to be considered in planning the lighting arrangements. Wall fixtures at either side of the mirror are useful. If only one light is available, fasten it above the center of the mirror, rather than in the center of the room.

Time is getting short, but let me say a word about the kitchen. Eye-strain is just as hard on the cook as on anyone else in the family, perhaps harder since she usually must spend so many hours in this one room. So the kitchen needs plenty of windows to let in daylight, and plenty of artificial light for dull weather or evening use. To provide adequate light for the different kitchen jobs, lights should be directed on the stove, the table and the sink. And these lights should be frosted or shaded to prevent glare. The backgrounds of the kitchen -- that is the walls and woodwork -- have a great deal to do with the lighting. A dark, dull wall reflects little light, while a light wall with a shiny finish reflects a great deal. For eye comfort probably the best background for the kitchen is light colored, but not pure white, and dull in finish.

Tomorrow: "Simple Desserts."

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