Kwashiorkor Encyclopedia Article

Kwashiorkor

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Kwashiorkor

One of many severe protein energy malnutrition disorders that are a widespread problem among children in developing countries. The word's origin is in Ghana, where it means a deposed child, or a child that is no longer suckled. The disease usually affects infants between one and four years of age who have been weaned from breast milk to a high starch, low protein diet. The disease is characterized by lethargy, apathy, or irritability. Over time the individual will experience retarded growth processes both physically and mentally. Approximately 25% of children suffer from recurrent relapses of kwashiorkor, interfering with their normal growth.

Kwashiorkor results in amino **acid** deficiencies which inhibit protein synthesis in all tissues. The lack of sufficient **plasma** proteins, specifically albumin, results in **systemic** pressure changes, ultimately causing generalized edema. The liver swells with stored fat because there are no hepatic proteins being produced for digestion of fats. Kwashiorkor additionally results in reduced bone density and impaired renal function. If treated early on in its development the disease can be reversed with proper dietary therapy and treatment of associated infections. If the condition is not reversed in its early stages, prognosis is poor and physical and mental growth will be severely retarded.

See Also

Sahel; Third World