

The Use of Nutmeg as a Psychotropic Drug

Report of Two Cases

E. Y. WILLIAMS, M.D. AND FRED WEST, M.D., PH.D.

*Department of Neurology and Psychiatry,
Howard University, Washington, D.C.*

THE NUTMEG COMPLEX

WITH the increasing cost and difficulty of procuring heroin and the fear of its use, many in recent years who desire to use drugs to produce a 'kick' resort to other substances. Among those allegedly utilized have been nutmeg, banana peel, glue, L.S.D. and "aspirin and coke with gin."

In this study two cases of the use of nutmeg for this purpose are reported (nutmeg complex).

CASE REPORTS

CASE I: R. G., a 30-year-old laborer was told of the use of nutmeg to produce a "happy feeling" by a friend. He stated that he had heard that the use of nutmeg would also "give the kick of a mule," if well mixed. Accordingly he used a small can of nutmeg, poured the same into a bowl and then added a glass of grapefruit juice and half a glass of coke. Using an eggbeater to mix this concoction, he soon had it prepared for drinking. Then, before three friends, who looked on with curiosity, he drank a glass of the mixture and subsequently another half glass.

About two hours later he first experienced great thirst. Yet, when he saw water he seemed afraid to drink it. After drinking one half glass of water, all objects in the room seemed to be swaying slightly. Color of objects seemed deeper and he seemed to be swaying. He thought these conditions were unreal, yet he felt they were happening at the same time. Confused, he went to bed and pulled the pillow over his head, but he was too restless to stay in this position long because he felt "so hot." Then he seemed as though he had to lift his legs higher as he walked. Gradually he realized he did not know what he was doing. He called his wife who called some of his friends to stay with him and to help, if necessary, because she had become frightened.

At this stage he appeared nauseated and talked incessantly. At intervals he seemed quite happy, elated and amorous and, every now and then, stopped as though he was listening to something. By this time he reported being "light-headed," as if floating, with some vague abdominal pains. This experience had now gone on for several hours. At this stage he was given some weak salt water to make him vomit, since it was believed that he had been drinking and this might help as a gastric lavage. He stated that he was told that he did not vomit

but soon fell into a heavy sleep. He awakened about six hours later with a strange feeling as if he were not quite real, as if he had been in a "trance." For the next eight hours he felt that he wanted to cry, but could not. He became depressed and slowly drank some warm milk. He showed evidence of tremors some 48 hours later, but gradually felt better.

CASE II: K. M., a 23-year-old brick-layer decided to try the same experience of his friend, because it sounded fantastic and unreal. Taking a small can of nutmeg, he mixed it with grapefruit juice and ginger-ale. The exact amounts he did not determine. He drank two full glasses and then decided to go home that evening and go to bed. In bed he had the sense that the bed was moving with him so that he got out and sat in a chair. He had auditory and visual hallucinations, became restless and was unable to sleep. The color of things seemed deeper—dark objects seemed darker and white seemed whiter. He lost his appetite. He was afraid to drink water and became fearful of everything. His mouth was parched. His father was called. His eyes were reddened. He had not eaten and his hallucinatory experience had increased.

Hospitalization was advised, and he was restrained forcibly. The heart rate was rapid, 140 per minute and the skin was warm. The blood pressure was $\frac{140}{70}$. The reflexes were lively, but no Babinski was present. The patient was given fluids daily for three days, which included 2000 cc. of 5% glucose in normal saline. A chelating agent, calcium versenate was given daily for two days. After the fluids, the patient recovered from this ordeal in four days.

COMMENT

The use of nutmeg as a psychotropic substance was reported by Weil and Shulgin.¹ Symptoms similar to those reported were also noted by McCord,² who described symptoms of restlessness, dizziness, fear of death, coldness of extremities, precordial and abdominal pain. Deliriousness, dyspnea, rapid pulse and increased body temperature were also noted. Many of these symptoms were noted in our patients. That this substance makes patients "get high" and thus give rise to intoxication has been reported by Payne,³ who reported cases.

In his autobiography Malcolm X⁴ reported that while in prison he used nutmeg in water and found it had the "kick" of three or four reefer.

These data and many others have proved that nutmeg can be, and is a dangerous drug. It has been known to produce death in large enough doses.⁵

SUMMARY

Two instances of patients using nutmeg have been reported. Symptoms of restlessness, delirium, warmth of the body, abdominal and chest pains, hallucinations and delusions were the predominant manifestations.

While this drug is much cheaper for use and

probably less dangerous than the habit-forming heroin, it must be stated that it is not free from danger and may cause death.

LITERATURE CITED

1. SHULGIN, A. T. Possible Implications of Myristica (Nutmeg) as a Psychotropic Substance. *Nature* 210: 380. 1966 (London).
2. MCCORD, J. A. and L. P. JERVEY. Nutmeg Poisoning. *J. South Carolina Med. Assoc.*, 58:430, 1962.
3. PAYNE, R. A. Nutmeg Intoxication. *New England J. Med.* 209:30, 1963.
4. HALEY, A. *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*. New York Grove Press, New York, N. Y. 1964.
5. CUSHNY, A. R. Nutmeg Poisoning *Proceed. Prac. Royal Soc. Med.*, 1:39, 1908.

(Contents, concluded)

PRESIDENT'S COLUMN	
Doctors and the Spirit of Resurrection City.....	318
EDITORIALS	
The Honorable Lyndon Baines Johnson.....	319
The Establishment, the Negro and Education.....	320
INTEGRATION	
Health Services and the Poor People's Campaign.....	332
The American Red Cross in Civil Disorders.....	333
BRIEFS	
Meharry Expansion Program.....	334
Meharry's Community Service Programs.....	334
African Medical Education Fund.....	336
National Medical Fellowships Awards for 1968-69.....	336
Howard and Meharry Internship Appointments, 1968-69.....	337
PROFESSIONAL NEWS	
Medical Education	340
Organizations	341
Personal	343
New Diplomates and College Fellows.....	343
Deaths	344
NMA AUTHORS	346
ANNOUNCEMENTS	346
SNMA	
Fourth Annual Seminar.....	347
LEGAL COUNSEL	
Physician Electing to Treat by Prolotherapy Alters the Method at His Peril.....	348
NMA ACTIVITIES	
State of the NMA.....	349
Current Status of the NMA Foundation.....	353
CORRESPONDENCE	354
BOOK REVIEWS	355