

Health Office made clear in a 1939 report complaining that sleeping pills were being taken in extraordinarily high dosages—as many as forty per night for one popular brand (Phanodorm). Evidence began to grow that Germans were using sleeping pills to commit suicide, which obviously did not make the government sleep easy.¹¹⁵

Ordinary foods were also explored for their performance-enhancing power. A 1942 study found that a warm meal could “increase performance by 10 percent” among women doing night-shift work.¹¹⁶ A 1941 investigation reported that workers exposed to extremes of heat were best served by foods high in carbohydrates.¹¹⁷ Reduction of fatigue was a focus of many investigations of this sort: experiments done by Otto Ranke in 1940 and 1941, for example, showed that a high-protein diet could, under certain circumstances, stave off fatigue and increase capacity to work.¹¹⁸

One of the goals of such research was to determine how much protein the average adult man had to consume to maintain “full performance” (eighty grams per day, according to one study). Calorie intake was studied: Ranke, for example, showed that a diet of less than 2,000 calories per day could not be maintained without gradual weight loss, primarily owing to the loss of the body’s fat reserves.¹¹⁹ Attention also focused increasingly on finding out how little food a person needed to survive or work in different environments. A 1942 study explored the caloric needs of men and women of different ages and body size, recording how food needs varied with work pace and other variables. The author found that women, on average, needed only 90 percent of what men needed, but that children of both sexes needed almost the same as adult men. Professions involving standing or walking demanded an extra 10 percent, stressful occupations (foundry workers, carpenters, and camp workers [!], for example) even more, and trades requiring extreme physical exertion (smiths, riveters, construction workers) even more again.

Precise calculations of daily caloric needs were made for each of these groups in different types of conditions.¹²⁰ A 1939 study had found that students helping with the harvest burned an average of 3,610 calories per day, while farmworkers consumed about 5,700

calories. The highest consumption recorded was among mountain climbers and skiers: a 1944 analysis found that people involved in such activities could burn 9,000 or even 10,000 calories a day. Still other studies were done to investigate resistance to cold as a function of caloric intake. A series of studies begun in 1944 showed that resistance increased with protein consumption and decreased with fat intake. These last-mentioned studies were continued after the war with support from U.S. military authorities¹²¹—though there is often uncertainty concerning where the original experiments were carried out, whether concentration camp prisoners were used as subjects, for example (the published reports rarely say). More research needs to be done in this area—especially to find out whether such studies may have tied in somehow with the starvation of the handicapped in “euthanasia” institutions.

Efforts to rationalize German food can also be seen in the push to discover substitutes for foods made scarce by the war. Synthetic honey and margarine were already features of the First World War, as is clear from the first few pages of Erich Remarque’s famous 1928 novel, *All Quiet on the Western Front*. In the Second World War, the list of synthetics was greatly expanded. Mineral oils were used in cooking, yeast was made from wood, and fish protein was encouraged in baking. Searches were launched to find new substitutes for coffee (malt coffee and a brew derived from oats), protein (soybeans were a hot item, earning them the label “Nazi beans”), and diverse fats and oils (hardened walnut oil, for example, used as a lard substitute). Experiments were performed to see whether nutrients could be extracted from fruit pits, and whether alfalfa could serve as a human food. Military, medical, and economic urgencies merged in many of these quests—as when articles began to appear on how to identify wild forest plants suitable for the brewing of herbal teas.¹²² Children were encouraged to tell their parents to drink these “German teas,” the rationale being that they were good for your health, good for the German economy, and good for the war effort (see figs. 5.6 and 5.7).¹²³

Artificial fat was an object of special interest. Researchers at Otto Flössner’s Reich Health Office laboratory in 1941 conducted both human and animal experiments on synthetic fat, though opinions