
The connection between nutrition and immunology is a fascinating one and is of special interest, particularly to developing countries. It is certainly not exaggerated that malnutrition is the major cause of secondary immune deficiencies in the world, as stated in the introduction to this volume. As one reads on it becomes obvious that one major problem in elucidating the role of nutrition on the immune system is the fact that most studies are done in children with protein calorie malnutrition — usually with infections — where there is a deficiency of only one nutrient. The effects of single nutrient deficiencies are mostly investigated in animal studies where the extrapolation to human conditions is only possible with great caution. Based on this background, the book is timely and 19 authors have reviewed the world literature and tried to separate fact from fiction in this difficult area of research. The balance of this book is slightly tipped to the nutritional side, and only three authors are — by their affiliation — identifiable as immunologists. The effects of under nutrition on cytokine responses and on plasma inhibitory factors are covered as well as the effects of lipid disturbances, vitamins, iron, zinc and other trace element deficiencies. I believe, as a personal hobby of the editor, the effects of over nutrition are also covered. Although the book is well edited, it is not quite clear to me how ‘Immunoparesis caused by viral and bacterial infections’ and ‘Immunological aspects and diabetes mellitus’ fit into this worthwhile volume. I personally liked the chapters on lipids, vitamin B and iron deficiency best; they were well structured, well referenced and critically assessed.

This book is certainly valuable for PhD students embarking on research in this field. It is less rewarding for ‘pure’ immunologists who would have liked a more thorough and critical discussion of the immunological results presented. It is also of interest for paediatricians intending to work in developing countries or looking after children with chronic malabsorptive states.

The price of $69 probably makes it out of reach for the interested individual, but the money is certainly well spent for departmental and/or institute libraries. 

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Books received


