



Neurasthenic Nation: America's Search for Health, Happiness, and Comfort, 1869-1920 (Critical Issues in Health and Medicine)

David G. Schuster

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As the United States rushed toward industrial and technological modernization in the late nineteenth century, people worried that the workplace had become too competitive, the economy too turbulent, domestic chores too taxing, while new machines had created a fast-paced environment that sickened the nation. Physicians testified that, without a doubt, modern civilization was causing a host of ills—everything from irritability to insomnia, lethargy to weight loss, anxiety to lack of ambition, and indigestion to impotence. They called this condition *neurasthenia*.

Neurasthenic Nation investigates how the concept of neurasthenia helped doctors and patients, men and women, and advertisers and consumers negotiate changes commonly associated with “modernity.” Combining a survey of medical and popular literature on neurasthenia with original research into rare archives of personal letters, patient records, and corporate files, David Schuster charts the emergence of a “neurasthenic nation”—a place where people saw their personal health as inextricably tied to the pitfalls and possibilities of a changing world.

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