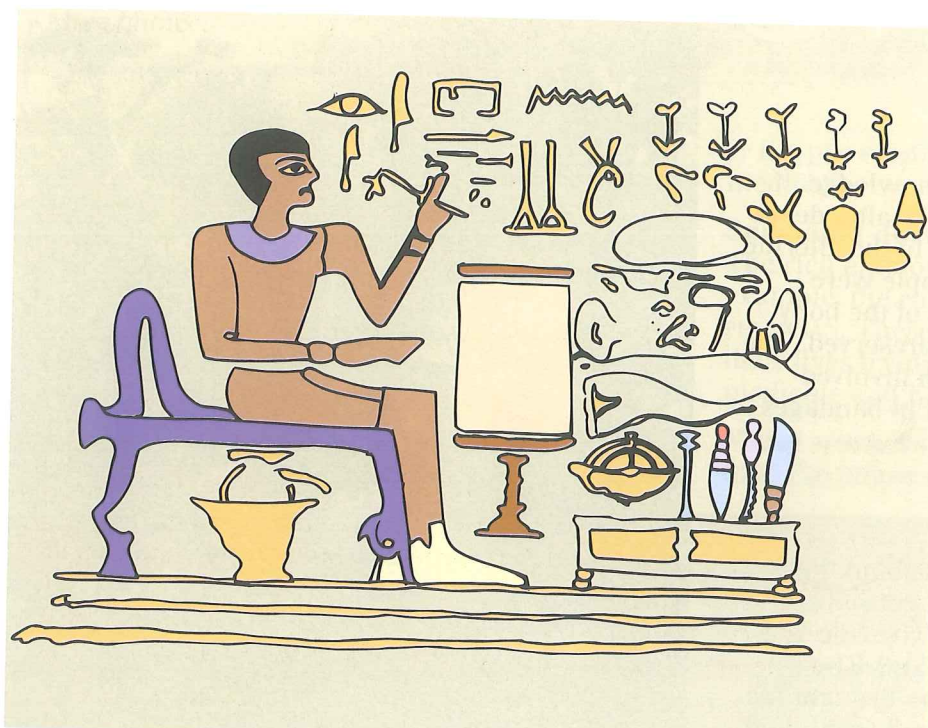


Who treated the sick in ancient Egypt?

YOU HAVE ALREADY found that the Egyptians had specialist doctors. They were not the only people who healed the sick in ancient Egypt. Sources 1–5 tell you more about the doctors, and provide clues about some of the other healers.

SOURCE 1 An Egyptian poem written around 1500bc

“ It is seven days from yesterday since I saw my love,
And sickness has crept over me,
My limbs have become heavy,
I cannot feel my own body.
If the master-physicians come to me
I gain no comfort from their remedies.
And the priest-magicians have no cures,
My sickness is not diagnosed.
My love is better by far for me than any remedies.
She is more important than all the books of medicine. ”



SOURCE 2 Redrawing of a carved panel showing Irj, doctor to the Pharaoh, with his medical equipment, c.1500bc. In his funeral inscription Irj is described as ‘Palace doctor, Superintendent of the court physicians, Palace eye physician, Palace physician of the belly, One understanding internal fluids, Guardian of the anus’

1. List the kinds of healers mentioned in Sources 1–5.
2. What evidence is there that Egyptian doctors were specialists?
3. According to Source 1 how did Egyptian doctors pass on their knowledge to each other?
4. There is no evidence here that mothers and wives acted as healers. Does that prove that they did not act as healers?



SOURCE 3 The goddess Sekhmet, goddess of war. Egyptians believed that she also caused and cured epidemics. Some of her priests were also doctors

SOURCE 4 The funeral inscription of one of Sekhmet’s priests

“ I was a priest of Sekhmet strong and skilful in the Art: One who put his hands upon the sick and so found out; One who is skilful with his eye. ”

SOURCE 5 From J. Worth Estes, *The Medical Skills of Ancient Egypt*, 1989

“ Perhaps the most surprising amongst the known [healing priests] is a woman named Peseshet who lived during the Old Kingdom [2649–2150bc]. She was Lady Overseer of Lady Physicians ... The only other woman among the [129] known physicians of Ancient Egypt [was] named Tawe ... ”

What did Egyptian healers know about the body and causes of disease?

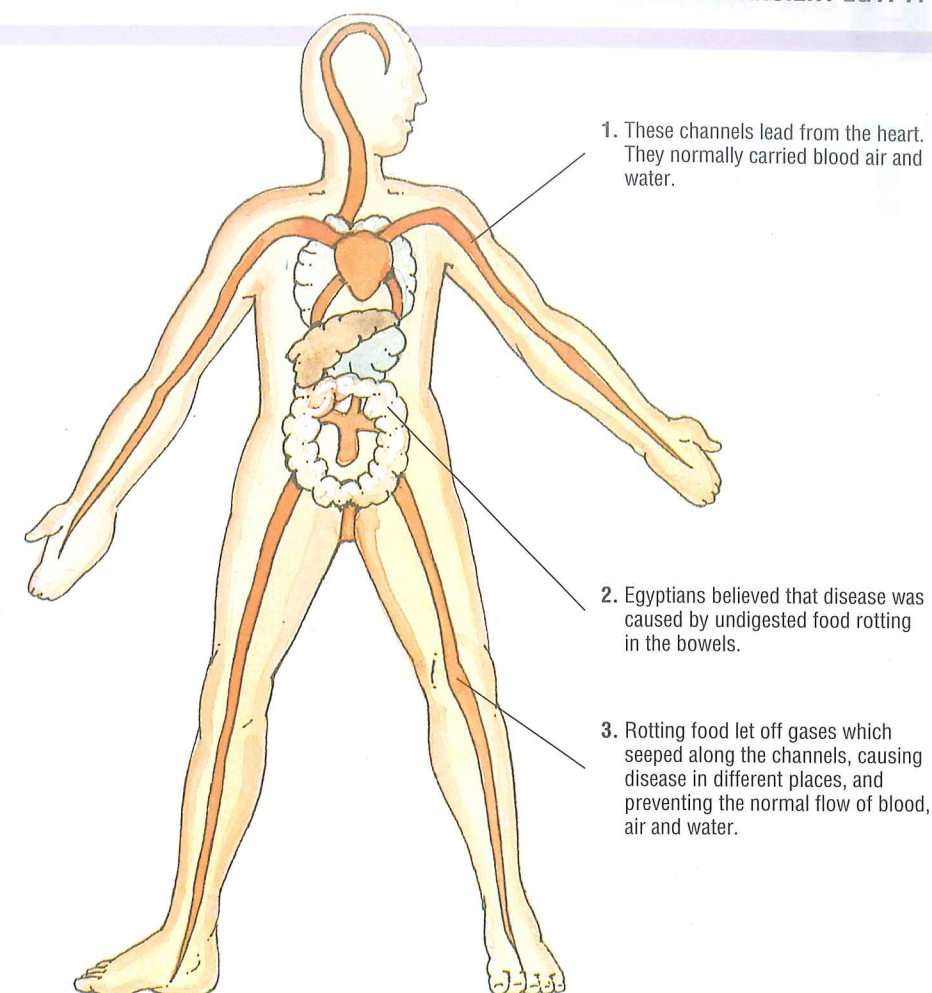
The Egyptians knew about the heart, the pulse, liver, brain, lungs and the blood. However, they did not understand the proper roles of these parts of the body.

Egyptians believed that the heart was the most important organ in the body. They described how blood flowed through over 40 channels from the heart to every part of the body. The blood carried air and water that were essential for life. Healthy channels were vital for good health. Everyday greetings included ‘May your channels be sound!’

In Egypt when someone died the body was embalmed (see page 17). Many of the organs were taken out (only the heart was left inside) and the body was then preserved with spices. Egyptians learned a little about ANATOMY (the parts of the body) from this but embalming was carried out quickly for religious reasons and because of the heat. Egyptians also believed that people would need their bodies in the afterlife so dissection of other parts of the body was forbidden.

5. If Egyptian doctors wanted to learn more about parts of the body how did embalming:
 - a) help them
 - b) hinder them?
6. Irrigation was important to Egyptian farmers. If the channels from the River Nile were blocked the crops would die in the great heat. How do you think the River Nile influenced their ideas about the causes of disease? You may need to refer back to page 17.
7. What other factors might have helped Egyptians arrive at the explanation of disease in Source 6? For example, why might they think that rotting food in the bowel lets off gases?

WHO TREATED THE SICK IN ANCIENT EGYPT?



1. These channels lead from the heart. They normally carried blood air and water.

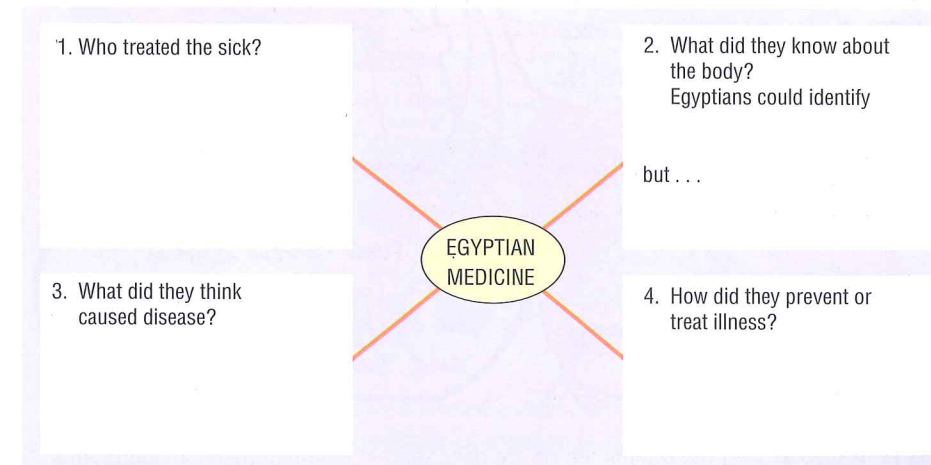
2. Egyptians believed that disease was caused by undigested food rotting in the bowels.

3. Rotting food let off gases which seeped along the channels, causing disease in different places, and preventing the normal flow of blood, air and water.

SOURCE 6 Egyptian ideas about the causes of disease

ACTIVITY

Here are the beginnings of a chart summarising Egyptian medicine. Use the information on these two pages to complete the first three sections. You can complete the final section from the information and sources on the next two pages.



How did the Egyptians treat illnesses and injuries?

1. Sort Sources 1–7 into the following categories:

- the use of herbs
- the use of surgery
- the use of magic or charms
- other treatments (list them).

2. Which of these kinds of treatment were also used in prehistoric times? (See pages 11–13.)

3. Egyptian doctors were developing rational cures like that in Source 3. Why do you think they still used the treatments described in Source 4?

4. Use this information to complete your chart from the previous page.

SOURCE 2 From the Ebers Papyrus

“For a diseased eye

To clear up the PUS: honey, balm from Mecca and gum ammoniac. To treat its discharge: frankincense, myrrh, yellow ochre. To treat the growth: red ochre, malachite, honey.

For diseases of the bladder
Bread in a rotten condition. The doctor must use it to fight the sickness – not to avoid the sickness.”

SOURCE 3 From the Edwin Smith Papyrus, a collection of Egyptian medical documents written around 1600bc. The papyrus lists 48 cases of surgery, each with a careful description of examination, symptoms, diagnosis and treatment

“Instructions for treating a broken nose

Examination

If you examine a man whose nose is disfigured – part of it squashed in, the other part swollen and both his nostrils are bleeding.

Diagnosis

Then you should say ‘You have a broken nose and this is an AILMENT which I can treat’.

Treatment

You should clean his nose with two plugs of linen and then insert two plugs soaked in grease into his nostrils. You should make him rest until the swelling has gone down, you should bandage his nose with stiff rolls of linen and treat him with lint every day until he recovers.”

SOURCE 1 The Greek historian Herodotus visited Egypt around 450bc and recorded this information

“Each Egyptian has a net. He uses it to fish by day, but at night spreads it over his bed to keep off mosquitoes.”

SOURCE 6 Written by the Greek historian, Herodotus, in the fifth century bc

“For three successive days every month they [the Egyptians] purge themselves ... for they think that all diseases stem from the foods they eat... they drink from cups of bronze which they clean daily. They are careful to wear newly washed linen clothing. They practise circumcision for the sake of cleanliness. Their priests shave their whole body every third day so no lice may infect them while they are serving the gods. Twice a day and every night they wash in cold water.”

SOURCE 7 From J. Worth Estes, *The Medical Skills of Ancient Egypt*, 1989

“Skinned whole mice have been found in the stomachs of children buried in an [ancient Egyptian] cemetery, perhaps administered as a treatment of last resort. Mouse fat is recommended in the Ebers Papyrus ‘to relax stiffness’ and a mouse head to remedy earaches. A rotten mouse is the chief ingredient of a Hearst Papyrus ointment that would keep the hair from turning white. During the reign of Nero (AD54–68), the Greek physician Dioscorides noted that whole mice would dry children’s saliva, and that chopped mice were useful for scorpion bites. Two thousand years later, in 1924, skinned whole mice were being used for the treatment of both urinary incontinence and whooping cough in rural England.”

5. Why might the cure for a diseased eye in Source 2 have worked? Use Source 9 to help you.

6. Choose either Source 1 or Source 6 and explain why the measures it describes might help prevent disease.

7. Source 7 describes a cure which has been used for a long period. Why might such a cure be used over so many centuries?

■ ACTIVITY

Choose one of the treatments or remedies mentioned on this page and write an advertisement for it. Your advertisement should try to attract people to use your kind of treatment. It should therefore say:

- what the treatment involves
- who will provide it and where
- what the effects will be on the patient.

SOURCE 5 Some ceremonies of Ancient Egypt in around 750–300bc described by J. Worth Estes in *The Medical Skills of Ancient Egypt*, 1989

“... some temples were also associated with healing ... The sick could bathe in water that had been sanctified, perhaps in the temple’s sacred lake, so that they would be healed ... another procedure ... required the sick person to spend a night in the SANATORIUM with the expectation that the god would cause him to dream his cure.”

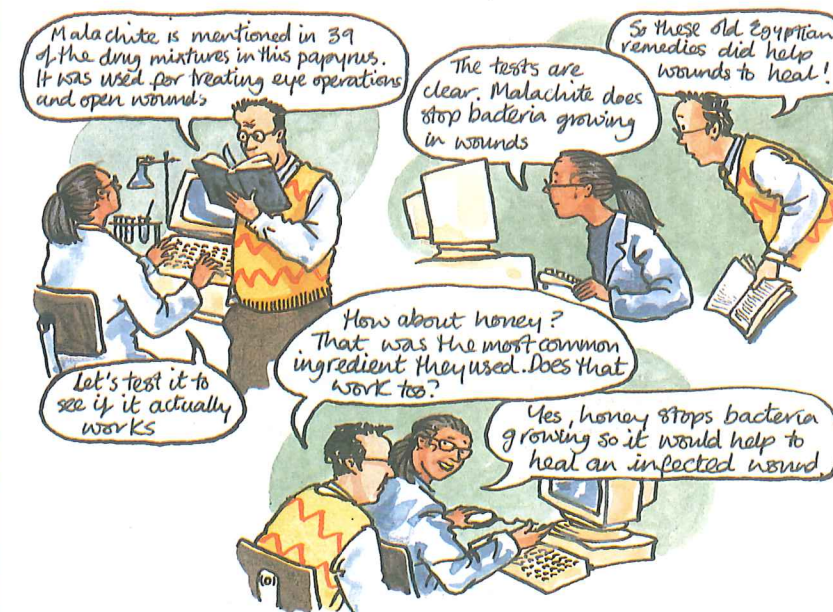
Did the Egyptian treatments work?

Some of these treatments might seem quite sensible to you, others might look no use at all. But just because a treatment is different from those we use today does not mean to say it would not work.

SOURCE 8 The most commonly used ingredients in Egyptian medicines as recorded in the Ebers Papyrus

Honey	30.3%
Djaret	14.6%
Frankincense	14.1%
Salt	10.4%
Dates	9.6%

[Historians are not sure what ‘djaret’ was. Many other ingredients were used, including juniper and figs.]



SOURCE 9 Scientists have analysed and tested some of the ancient Egyptian remedies. This cartoon is based on information in *The Medical Skills of Ancient Egypt*, written by J. Worth Estes, 1989



SOURCE 4 Two treatments which are described in Egyptian medical documents written between 1900bc and 1500bc

Egyptian medicine: a summary

Change

Medical knowledge and methods changed when people began to live in cities and became richer.

Their world was very different from that of prehistoric hunter-gatherers. They had specialist craftsmen, including doctors. Trade increased the range of herbs available for use as medicines. They developed writing and they began to learn about anatomy.

They also tried to work out a logical reason why people became ill. Learning from the waters of the Nile, they blamed blocked channels for causing illness.

Summary: what was new?

- There were doctors as well as medicine men.
- Doctors looked for logical causes of disease.
- Doctors could identify some parts of the body.
- New herbs were used as medicines.
- Metal instruments were used for surgery.

Continuity

However, not everything was new. Egyptians used many herbs in the same ways as their ancestors. They still did not understand the function of important parts of the body, such as the liver, and how they kept people healthy.

Nor did the Egyptians understand the real causes of disease despite efforts to find a logical cause. Without that understanding they were often helpless when sickness spread. That was why Egyptians still believed in evil spirits and protected themselves with AMULETS.

Summary: what stayed the same?

- People still believed in gods and spirits.
- Herbs were still used as medicines.
- People still did not understand how the body worked.
- People still did not understand what caused diseases.

TASK

You are going to write an essay on the topic 'Was Egyptian medicine an important step forward?'

Use each of these questions as the basis for one paragraph of your essay.

1. Which old ideas or methods did the Egyptians continue to use?
2. What new ideas or methods did the Egyptians use?
3. Were the changes more important than the continuities?

You can get a sheet from your teacher to help you.

1. Which of the speakers in the cartoon below do you most agree with? Use the evidence on pages 8-21 to explain your answer.



Were there medical developments in other places?

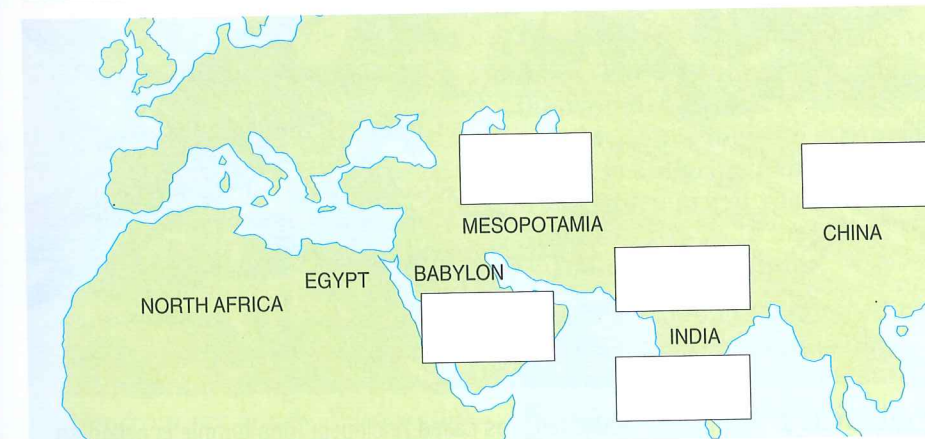
Egypt was not the only early society to have doctors and new medical ideas as you can see from Sources 1-5.

SOURCE 1 An inscription on a doctor's seal from Mesopotamia, 2000bc

"O God Edinmugi, Servant of the God Gir, you who help animal mothers to give birth, Urlugaledina the doctor is your servant."

SOURCE 2 A herbal remedy written in an Indian medical book. The remedy was used by 1000bc and probably earlier. Takman, the disease being treated, was probably malaria

"Kushta the most healing of plants, you are born in the mountains. Come down O Kushta, destroy Takman, drive Takman away from here. Aches in the head, inflammation on the eye, pains in the body, all these the Kushta plant heals."



SOURCE 6 Map showing the places mentioned in Sources 1-5

SOURCE 3 From the Laws of Hammurabi, Babylon, around 2000bc

"If a doctor opens a spot in a man's eye with a bronze instrument and so heals the man's eye he is to be paid ten shekels of silver for his work. If the doctor destroys the man's eye, his hands are to be cut off."



SOURCE 4 Sewers, water pipes and baths were built in the city of Mohenjo-daro in India around 1500bc. Cities like this needed to bring in fresh water supplies and to get rid of huge quantities of sewage. If they did not have a good PUBLIC HEALTH system then diseases spread quickly in crowded cities. This photo shows the remains of the sewers which can still be seen today



SOURCE 5 An illustration showing acupuncture points. Acupuncture was used in China well before 1000bc. Chinese doctors stopped pain by pressing on certain points of the body. At first they used sharp flints and later metal needles

ACTIVITY

Your teacher will give you a copy of Source 6. On your own map fill in the empty rectangles to show or describe each of the developments in the sources on this page.

Include in your description whether these are features which were also present in prehistoric Britain or in ancient Egypt.