

1.6 Rome *Why was Galen so important?*

Galen was a famous doctor in Rome. These two pages help you to decide why he was so important and also help you to build up a diagram to use for revision because you will certainly need to know about him for your exam.

Galen's ideas

Galen was born in AD129 in Greece. He began studying medicine when he was sixteen. He spent a long time as a surgeon at a GLADIATORS' school. The gladiators often suffered stab wounds and broken bones. Galen learned a lot about anatomy and treatments.

When he was 33 Galen travelled to Rome. He soon became the Emperor's doctor. He followed Hippocrates' ideas but also had new ideas of his own.

Old ideas

I believe in Hippocrates' methods.

- Most diseases are caused when the humours are out of balance.
- We must observe our patients carefully and record their symptoms before deciding how to treat them.

New idea 1: the treatment of opposites

But I have a new idea that builds on the theory of the four humours. We must use opposites to balance up the humours and treat illness. For example, if a man has a cold and is sneezing and coughing up phlegm we must treat him with the opposite to cold phlegm. Give him hot fiery pepper – that will balance his humours.



I am more important than all the public health inspectors and engineers in Rome! I am the most important person in the history of medicine – so pay attention to these pages!

ACTIVITY

Use the information from this section to make some important revision notes about Galen. Draw a diagram like the one below to organise your notes.

Background information about Galen

Existing ideas and methods followed by Galen

Galen

Galen's importance to the development of medicine

New ideas and methods used by Galen

New idea 2: the brain controls the body

I proved that the brain controls speech. I also showed that the brain controls other parts of the body. Before me people thought that the heart controlled the body.

A famous experiment

Galen also visited Alexandria in Egypt where he was allowed to DISSECT human bodies. He learned a great deal about how the body works. However, dissection of humans was forbidden in Rome so he had to use pigs instead.

One day Galen did a famous experiment in front of an audience to prove his idea that the brain controls the body. He cut into a pig's neck and found the nerves. The pig squealed.

'Watch,' said Galen to his audience, 'I will cut this nerve but the pig will keep on squealing.'

He cut. The pig kept squealing. Galen cut another nerve. Again the pig squealed.

'Now,' said Galen, 'I will cut another nerve that controls the pig's voice. It will not squeal.'

Galen cut the nerve. The room was silent.



▼ **SOURCE 1** An illustration showing Galen's famous experiment. This was drawn hundreds of years later, in the Middle Ages

New idea 3: perfect design

I also said that every organ in the body has a special role to play. It is as if the gods designed them all to fit together perfectly.

How important were Galen's ideas?

Galen's ideas and methods were extremely important. He had taken the best ideas of Hippocrates and the Greeks and combined them with his own work. Like Hippocrates, Galen also wrote down his ideas so that future doctors could learn from them. In fact, he wrote 60 books of medicine.

For the next 1500 years medical teaching was based on the ideas and

methods described in Galen's books. Nobody dared to disagree with them. When Christianity became the main religion in western Europe, the Church supported Galen's ideas too. This was because they thought that Galen's ideas (see new idea 3) fitted in very well with the Christian belief that God created human beings.