



Avicenna On Treating Swellings and Pimples from the Canon of Medicine Volume 2

By Abu 'Ali al-Husayn ibn Sina

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Avicenna prescribes the drugs that are healing or harmful in treating inflammations and pimples. The list of just some of the properties of healing or harmful drugs appears on the front cover: Causing cancer; Plague prevention; Treating: abscesses (carbuncle); acne; blisters; cancer; chronic skin disease (favus); eczema; flatulence; herpes; hives (urticaria); hot swellings; inflammation of nerve(s) (neuritis); inflammation of the breast (mastitis); inflammation of the kidneys (nephritis); inflammation of the mouth (stomatitis); inflammation of the muscles (myositis); inflammation of the penis (penitis); inflammation of the soft connective tissue (phlegmona); inflammation of the spleen (splenitis); inflammation of the testis (orchitis); inflammation of the urinary bladder (cystitis); inflammation of the uterus (uteritis); internal abscesses; intestinal hernia (enterocele); prickly heat; rashes (miliaria rubra); salivary gland infection (parotitis); swellings (odema); swellings filled with gas (physocele); swellings in the fluid sack in the scrotum (hydrocele); swellings and inflammation of the liver (hepatitis); swellings of the anus; swellings of the groin; swelling of wounds; tuberculosis of the lymphatic glands (scrofula); underarm swellings.

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Editorial Review

Review

The Canon of Medicine extended the theory of temperaments to encompass "emotional aspects, mental capacity, moral attitudes, self-awareness, movements and dreams." This work may thus be considered a "forerunner of twentieth century psychoanalysis." **Psychophysiology and psychosomatic medicine:** The *Canon* was an early text in psychophysiology and psychosomatic medicine, and the first to recognize 'physiological psychology' in the treatment of illnesses involving emotions, and developed a system for associating changes in the pulse rate with inner feelings, which is seen as an anticipation of the word association test attributed to Carl Jung. Avicenna identified love sickness (*Ishq*) ... illnesses together. It described melancholia (depression) as a type of mood disorder in which the person may become suspicious and develop certain types of phobias. It stated that anger heralded the transition of melancholia to mania, and explained that humidity inside the head can contribute to mood disorders. It recognized that this occurs when the amount of breath changes: happiness increases the breath, which leads to increased moisture inside the brain, but if this moisture goes beyond its limits, the brain would lose control over its rationality and lead to mental disorders. It also described symptoms and treatments for nightmare, epilepsy, and weak memory. **Sleep Medicine:** An early psychological perspective on bedwetting was given in *The Canon of Medicine*: "Urinating in bed is frequently predisposed by deep sleep: when urine begins to flow, its inner nature and hidden will (resembling the will to breathe) drives urine out before the child awakes. When children become stronger and more robust, their sleep is lighter and they stop urinating." **Surgery:** In surgery, the *Canon* was the first to describe the surgical procedure of intubation in order to facilitate breathing. **Anesthesia:** The *Canon* described the "soporific sponge", an anesthetic imbued with aromatics and narcotics, which was to be placed under a patient's nose during surgical operations. **Hirudotherapy:** Hirudotherapy, the use of medicinal leech for medical purposes, was introduced by *The Canon of Medicine*. It considered the application of leech to be more useful than cupping in "letting off the blood from deeper parts of the body." He also introduced the use of leech as treatment for skin disease. Leech therapy became a popular method in medieval Europe due to the influence of his *Canon*. **Other contributions: Chromotherapy:** The *Canon*, which described colour to be of vital importance in diagnosis and treatment, made significant contributions to chromotherapy. It stated that "Color is an observable symptom of disease" and also developed a chart that related colour to the temperature and physical condition of the body. His view was that red moved the blood, blue or white cooled it, and yellow reduced muscular pain and inflammation. The author further discussed the properties of colours for healing and was "the first to establish that the wrong colour suggested for therapy would elicit no response in specific diseases." As an example, "he observed that a person with a nosebleed should not gaze at things of a brilliant red color and should not be exposed to red light because this would stimulate the sanguineous humor, whereas blue would soothe it and reduce blood flow." --enotes, The Canon of Medicine, Wikipedia, Creative Commons Attribution/Share-Alike License

Dermatology: In dermatology, the preferred medication the *Canon* recommended for skin conditions, including skin cancer, was zinc oxide. Though today it is no longer used for treating skin cancer, it is still widely used today --enotes, The Canon of Medicine, Wikipedia, Creative Commons Attribution/Share-Alike License

Dermatology: In dermatology, the preferred medication the *Canon* recommended for skin conditions, including skin cancer, was zinc oxide. Though today it is no longer used for treating skin cancer, it is still widely used today to treat a variety of other skin conditions, in products such as baby powder and creams to treat diaper rashes, calamine cream, anti-dandruff shampoos, and antiseptic ointments. **Endocrinology:** In

endocrinology, the *Canon* provided a detailed account on diabetes mellitus in *The Canon of Medicine*, "describing the abnormal appetite and the collapse of sexual functions and he documented the sweet taste of diabetic urine." Like Aretaeus of Cappadocia before him, the *Canon* recognized a primary and secondary diabetes. It also described diabetic gangrene, and treated diabetes using a mixture of lupine, trigonella (fenugreek), and zedoary seed, which produces a considerable reduction in the excretion of sugar, a treatment which is still prescribed in modern times. It also "described diabetes insipidus very precisely for the first time", though it was later Johann Peter Frank (1745 1821) who first differentiated between diabetes mellitus and diabetes insipidus. --enotes, The Canon of Medicine, Wikipedia, Creative Commons Attribution/Share-Alike License

Gerontology and Geriatrics: *The Canon of Medicine* was the first book to offer instruction for the care of the aged, foreshadowing modern gerontology and geriatrics. A chapter entitled "Regimen of Old Age" stated that "old folk need plenty of sleep. Time spent on the couch should be liberal more than is legitimate for adults." It further stated that after waking up, the body should be anointed with oil "to stimulate the sensitive faculties". Regarding exercise, it recommended walking or horse-riding. It stated: "The factors to consider in regard to exercise in old people are the various bodily states of different persons; the sequels likely to arise from their ailments; and their previous habits as regards exercise." The book said that if the body is healthy, it can perform attempered exercises, but if one part of the body is infirm, "then that part should not be exercised until after the rest", and that exercises are not to be strictly graduated "as if the body were to be strengthened". The *Canon* recognized four periods of life: the period of growth, prime of life, period of elderly decline (from forty to sixty), and decrepit age. He states that during the last period, "there is hardness of their bones, roughness of the skin, and the long time since they produced semen, blood and vaporal breath". However, he agreed with Galen that the earth element is more prominent in the aged and decrepit than in other periods. Avicenna did not agree with the concept of infirmity, however, stating: "There is no need to assert that there are three states of the human body sickness, health and a state which is neither health nor disease. The first two cover everything." Thesis III of the *Canon* discussed the diet suitable for old people. Avicenna wrote that they should be given food in small amounts at a time and that they can have two to three meals a day, divided up according to the digestive powers and general condition of the old person in question. He also recommended fruits, such as figs and prunes. He also stated: "Some laudable nutrition may be allowed at bedtime, [but] robust old folk may have a more liberal supper, as long as they avoid any gross aliment... all hot, sharp or dessicative foods, such as dishes made with vinegar, salt, hot aromatics, seasonings and pickles. [Milk is good for the aged, being] nutritious and humectant in nature. [Yet] articles of food with a laxative action are most appropriate for the elderly." The book also dedicated several sections of its Thesis III to elderly patients who become constipated, and wrote: "Strong clysters (enemata) must be avoided because they dry up the gut. An unctuous enema is beneficial in cases where the bowels have been constipated for several days. ... Evacuations must be procured with as little stress as possible in the aged and decrepit, for it is to their advantage to get bowels opened gently." --enotes, The Canon of Medicine, Wikipedia, Creative Commons Attribution/Share-Alike License

About the Author

Abu 'Ali al-Husayn ibn Sina is better known in Europe by the Latinized name Avicenna. He is probably the most significant philosopher in the Islamic tradition and arguably the most influential philosopher of the pre-modern era. Born in Afshana near Bukhara in Central Asia in about 980, he is best known as a polymath, as a physician whose major work the *Canon (al-Qanun fi'l-Tibb)* continued to be taught as a medical textbook in Europe and in the Islamic world until the early modern period, and as a philosopher whose major *summa* the *Cure (al-Shifa')* had a decisive impact upon European scholasticism and especially upon Thomas Aquinas (d. 1274). Primarily a metaphysical philosopher of being who was concerned with understanding the self's existence in this world in relation to its contingency, Ibn Sina's philosophy is an attempt to construct a coherent and comprehensive system that accords with the religious exigencies of Muslim culture.

As such, he may be considered to be the first major Islamic philosopher. The philosophical space that he articulates for God as the Necessary Existence lays the foundation for his theories of the soul, intellect and cosmos. Furthermore, he articulated a development in the philosophical enterprise in classical Islam away from the apologetic concerns for establishing the relationship between religion and philosophy towards an attempt to make philosophical sense of key religious doctrines and even analyse and interpret the Qur'an. Recent studies have attempted to locate him within the Aristotelian and Neoplatonic traditions. His relationship with the latter is ambivalent: although accepting some key aspects such as an emanationist cosmology, he rejected Neoplatonic epistemology and the theory of the pre-existent soul. However, his metaphysics owes much to the Amonnian synthesis of the later commentators on Aristotle and discussions in legal theory and kalam on meaning, signification and being. Apart from philosophy, Avicenna's other contributions lie in the fields of medicine, the natural sciences, musical theory, and mathematics. In the Islamic sciences (*'ulum*), he wrote a series of short commentaries on selected Qur'anic verses and chapters that reveal a trained philosopher's hermeneutical method and attempt to come to terms with revelation. He also wrote some literary allegories about whose philosophical value recent scholarship is vehemently at odds. His influence in medieval Europe spread through the translations of his works first undertaken in Spain. In the Islamic world, his impact was immediate and led to what Michot has called *la pandémie avicennienne*. When al-Ghazali led the theological attack upon the heresies of the philosophers, he singled out Avicenna, and a generation later when the Shahrastani gave an account of the doctrines of the philosophers of Islam, he relied upon the work of Avicenna, whose metaphysics he later attempted to refute in his *Struggling against the Philosophers (Musari'at al-falasifa)*. Avicennan metaphysics became the foundation for discussions of Islamic philosophy and philosophical theology. In the early modern period in Iran, his metaphysical positions began to be displayed by a creative modification that they underwent due to the thinkers of the school of Isfahan, in particular Mulla Sadra (d. 1641).

-- Rizvi, Sajjad H. "Avicenna (Ibn Sina)" *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (January 2006)

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