

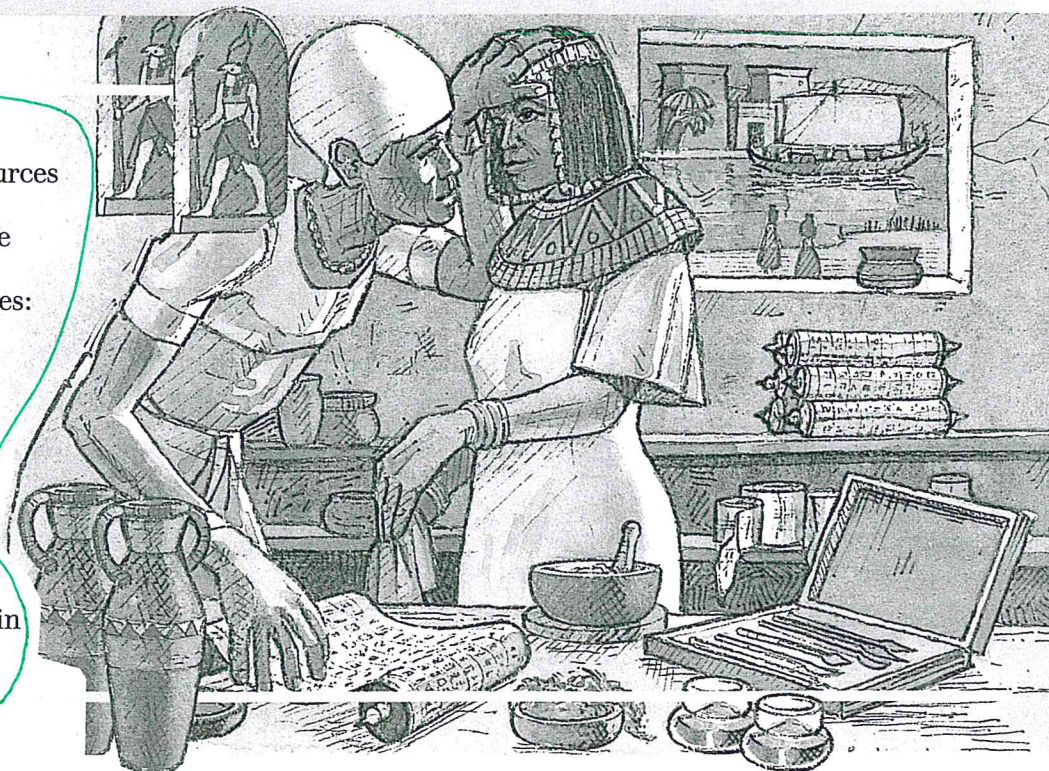
# How did life in Egypt affect medicine?

## ACTIVITY

1. Use the information and sources on pages 8–9 to make notes explaining how Egyptian life affected Egyptian medicine. Include the following features:

- wealth
- trade
- improved writing
- religion
- the Nile and farming.

2. Choose one feature that you think was particularly important and write a paragraph to explain your choice.

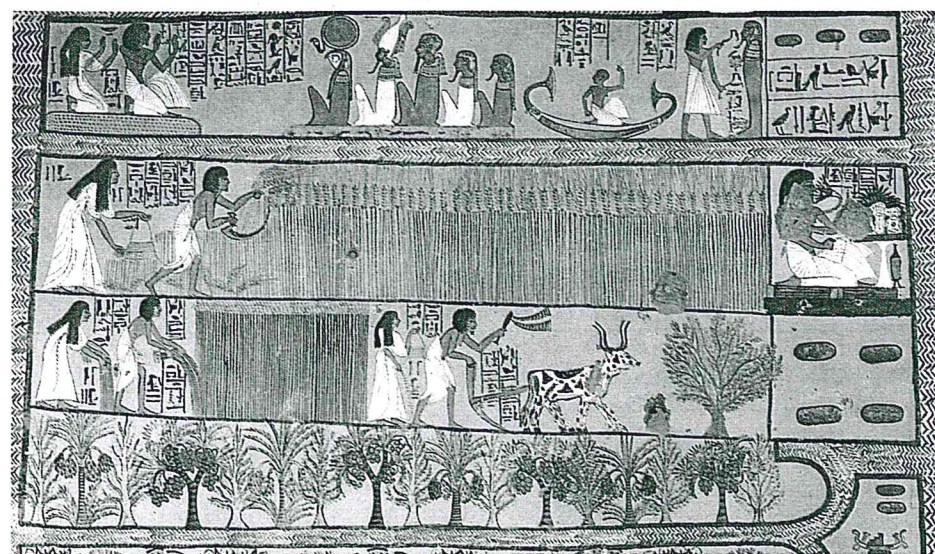


## A wealthy country

Egypt was a wealthy country, with powerful rulers, international trade, large cities and writing. It was the most advanced civilisation the world had known.

Egypt's wealth was based on the River Nile. When the river flooded every year it covered the surrounding land with fertile soil which gave rich harvests of good crops. Farming was so successful that landowners in Egypt became rich.

Egypt's wealth led to improvements in medicine.



**SOURCE 1** A tomb painting showing Egyptian farmers at work

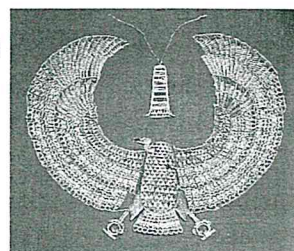
## Specialist doctors

The rich employed doctors to look after them. For example, the ruler (the Pharaoh) had his own **PHYSICIAN**. These specialist doctors spent much of their lives trying to improve their understanding of medicine and health.

## Metal workers

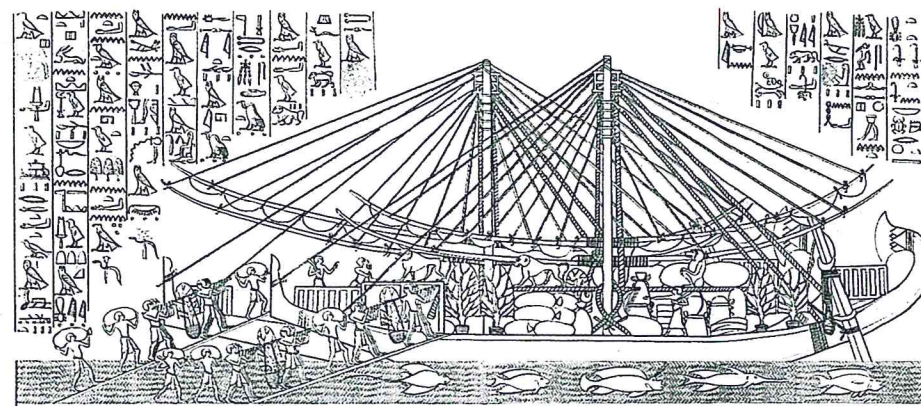
Rich Egyptians could also afford to employ specialist craftsmen such as metal workers to make tools or jewellery for them. These skilled craftsmen also made fine bronze instruments for the doctors, so Egyptian doctors worked with better medical instruments than healers in prehistoric times.

**SOURCE 2** 'Vulture Collar' necklace made for the Egyptian pharaoh Tutankhamun. The outlines of all the feathers, the head and limbs were made of gold. The feathers themselves were encrusted with precious stones



## Trade

Egypt had widespread trade links. Ships and merchants arrived from India, China and parts of Africa, bringing new herbs and plants with them. Many of these herbs and plants were recommended as medicines, so Egyptian healers built up a wide knowledge of herbal medicines.



## Improved writing

The Egyptians also developed **PAPYRUS** (a kind of paper made from reeds) and a simpler, quicker form of writing, which together made writing easier and more convenient than before.

Doctors benefited from these developments. Treatments and **REMEDIES** could be written down and passed on accurately to other healers.

**SOURCE 3** A wall carving showing Egyptians loading a trading ship for a voyage to Arabia. The Egyptians greatly improved the design of their ships so they could sail long distances across the Mediterranean

## Religion

Religion helped to increase medical knowledge. Egyptians believed that people had a life after death and that they would need their bodies in the afterlife. Therefore, the bodies of important people were **EMBALMED** ready for the afterlife. Parts of the body, such as the liver, were taken out and preserved. The rest of the body was embalmed, which involved treating it with spices and wrapping it in bandages to make a mummy.

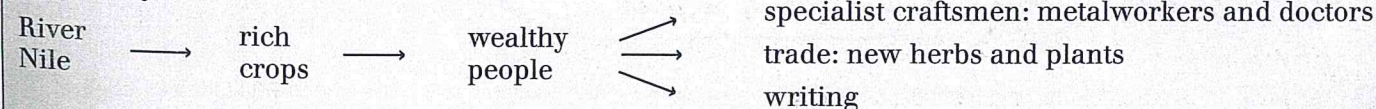
## The Nile and farming

Egyptian doctors began to think hard about the reasons why people became ill. They got some of their ideas from the River Nile itself. The Nile was so important to the health of their farmland. The irrigation channels dug by the farmers brought life to the farmland. Egyptian doctors began to think of the body as having many channels inside it which, if they became blocked, could cause a person to be unhealthy.



**SOURCE 4** A modern African farmer opens an irrigation channel to let water flow onto his crops. This same method of irrigation was used by ancient Egyptian farmers around the River Nile

## Summary



# How did the Egyptians treat illness 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. Egyptian doctors were developing rational cures like that in Source 3. Why do you think they still used the type of treatments described in Source 4?
3. Why might the cure for a diseased eye in Source 2 have worked? Use Source 9 to help you explain.

**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. ”**

4. Choose either Source 1 or Source 6 and explain why the measures it describes might have helped to prevent disease.
5. Source 7 describes a cure which has been used over a long period. Why might such a cure be used for 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 the treatment. It should therefore say:

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



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

**SOURCE 5** Some ceremonies of Ancient Egypt in 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. ”**

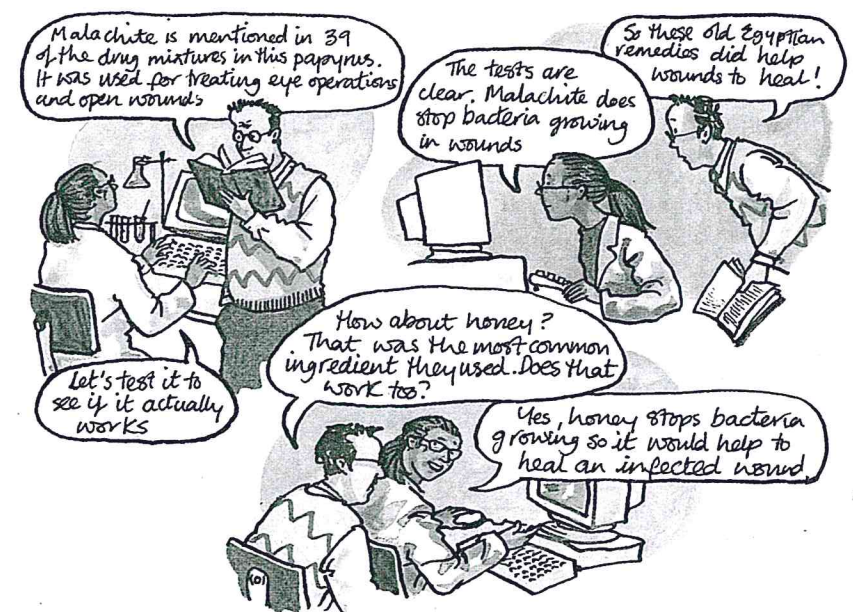
## Did the Egyptian treatments work?

Some of these treatments might seem quite sensible to you, others might look useless. 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* by J. Worth Estes, 1989