

Blood letting

Cutting into a vein and letting out blood into a bowl

Bloodletting (or blood-letting) is the withdrawal of blood from a patient to prevent or cure illness and disease. The doctor would use a fleam, also flem, flew, flue, fleame, or phleam, and cut into the patient's vein. The blood would allowed to flow into a bowl. This was based on the ancient system of medicine in which blood and other bodily fluids were regarded as "humours" that had to remain in proper balance to maintain health.

Leeching

Leeching was another popular form of bloodletting, used up until the 19th century. The leeches would be put on the body until the leech filled with blood. It has since been discovered that this practice does have some practical use as leeches release the proteins and peptides that thin blood and prevent clotting. This improves circulation and prevents tissue death. The leeches leave behind small, Y-shaped wounds that usually heal without leaving a scar. Leeches are effective at increasing blood circulation and breaking up blood clots.

Cupping

When a patient presented with a disease which was assumed to be caused by too much blood, then cupping might be prescribed. The position on the body in which the cupping glasses were to be applied was connected to the disease it was attempting to cure. They could be place anywhere from head to toe. The air in the glass was exhausted by burning a candle and the vacuum created in the glass caused the skin to be sucked into the glass on application. The idea was then that the excess humour was encouraged to the surface for easier dissipation. This could also be used with cutting the skin, which would cause bleeding which was then accelerated by the cupping, and the blood removed would gather in the glass. If the skin was not broken, this was sometimes called 'dry-cupping' and resulted in a blister, full of unwanted humours.