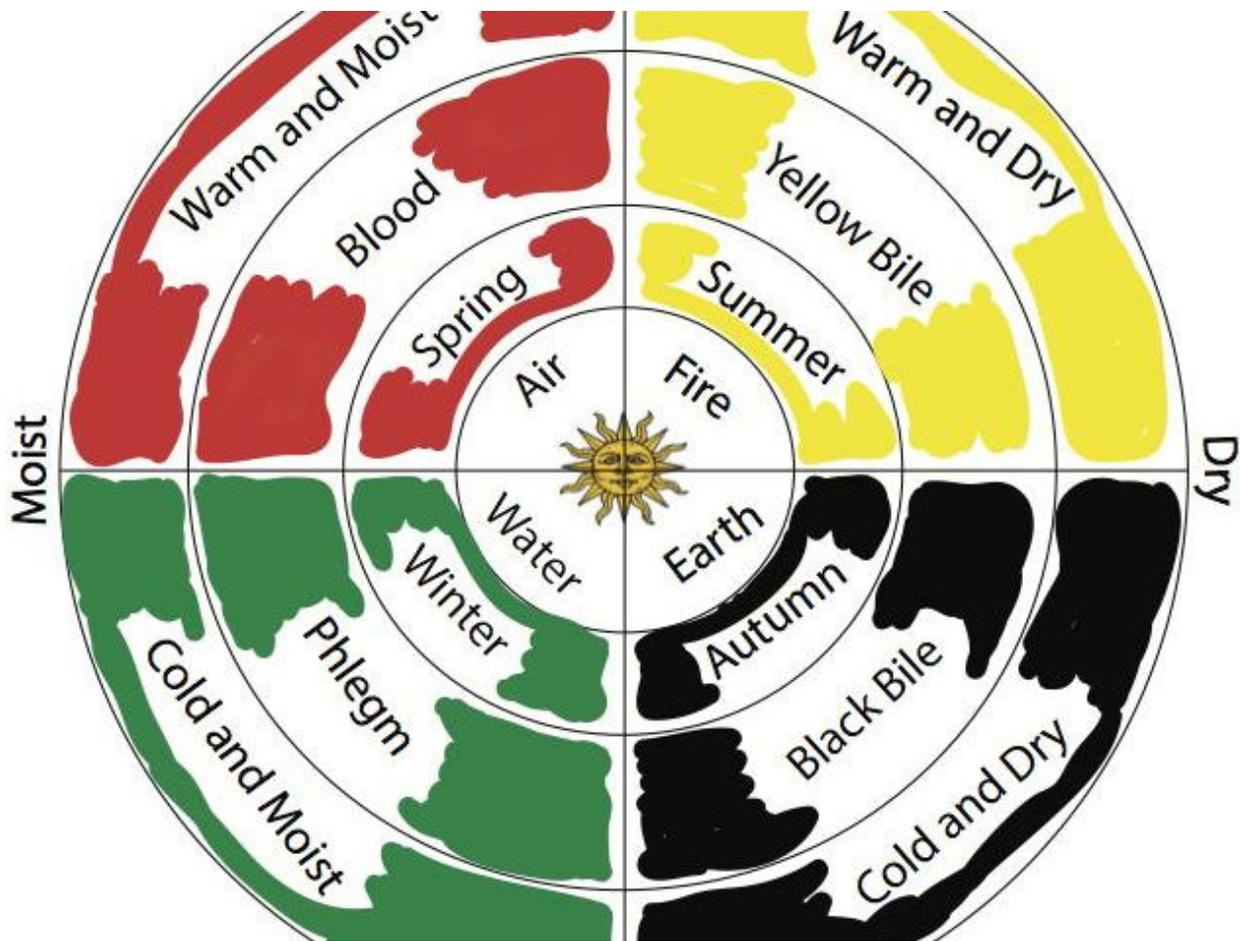


## What were the Four humours?



In Tudor times, the understanding of medicine and the human body was based on the theory of the four bodily humours. This idea dates back to ancient Greece, where the body was seen more or less as a shell containing four different humours, or fluids: blood, phlegm, black bile and yellow bile. The humours affect your whole being, from your health and feelings to your looks and actions.

The key to good health (and being a good person) is to keep your humours in balance. However, everyone has a natural excess of one of the humours, which is what makes us all look unique and behave differently. Shakespeare even mentions them on his plays: how medicine formed part of people's lives and thoughts.



Shakespeare used the four humours in his plays! One play really stands out when it comes to the subject of humours. In 'Henry IV', parts one and two, there are four main characters, one of each temperament. And they all have roughly the same number of lines.

So the play itself is very close to the ideal humoral balance. King Henry IV himself is melancholic, Prince Hal sanguine, Sir Harry Hotspur choleric and the knight Sir John Falstaff is phlegmatic.

Jack Falstaff is fat, lazy, cowardly, dishonest and sentimental, but the audience loved him despite all his faults. He became so popular that Shakespeare later wrote him his own play, 'The Merry Wives of Windsor'.



*Melancholic*

- Humor: **Black Bile**
  - Element: **Earth**
  - Season: **Winter**
  - Age: **Old Age**
- Qualities: **Cold & Dry**
  - Organ: **Spleen**
  - Planet: **Saturn**



*Phlegmatic*

- Humor: **Phlegm**
  - Element: **Water**
  - Season: **Autumn**
  - Age: **Maturity**
- Qualities: **Cold & Moist**
  - Organ: **Brain**
  - Planet: **Moon**



*Choleric*

- Humor: **Yellow Bile**
  - Element: **Fire**
  - Season: **Summer**
  - Age: **Childhood**
- Qualities: **Hot & Dry**
- Organ: **Gall Bladder**
  - Planet: **Mars**



### *Sanguine*

- Humor: **Blood**
- Element: **Air**
- Season: **Spring**
- Age: **Adolescence**
- Qualities: **Hot & Moist**
  - Organ: **Heart**
  - Planet: **Jupiter**

### Cures

To 'rebalance' the humours various 'cures' were used. For example, for black bile: eating natural laxatives such as olive oil or fig soaked in rosewater in order to rid the body of the waste material would also help ease excessive black bile symptoms. Rubbing sweet almond oil on the body or placing it in nostrils would greatly help treat dry skin and membranes. Other cures would include 'opposites' – so for 'hot' choleric, a cold bath maybe ordered. Herbs to drink or bath in, a change of occupation or blood-letting, cupping or purging were also popular up until the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.