

What Did People Believe Caused Disease and Illness?

Study the testimony of these medieval people. **Highlight** how they explained the causes of disease and illness in society and **categorise** the causes appropriately. What **evidence and reasons** did society have for believing these theories?

God sends illness to punish us for our sins. If we truly believe and repent our sins, then we will be cured. It is a test of our faith. If you live a truly good life, you will never be ill. God controls everything in life; he also controls the health of his people. Evil spirits may sometimes take control of a person and make them ill. The Church must exorcise the bad spirits out of the person to save his soul.

When my sister was ill, we saw the physician. He explained that, because she was born in the cold winter months, she was in danger of disease. It was a hot summer when she fell ill, and this, coupled with the wrong alignment of the planets and stars, meant she had no hope of survival. We knew she would die and she did. We didn't tell the priest as we knew we would get in trouble for consulting the physician, but we needed to consult his almanac (a type of calendar).

My husband is a leper. He is banned from speaking to people in our village in case they breathe in his poisoned breath and catch leprosy. He must wear a bell so villagers can hear him coming. If he loses any more of his toes we will have to send him to a leper colony on an island.

I am a truly religious person. I repent all sin and live a good life. I have never been ill. This is pure proof of God's divine power and existence. My neighbour was a wicked man, very greedy and ungodly. He missed Church regularly and one day he never woke up from his bed.

Most ill health is caused by the imbalance of humours. The world is made up of the four basic elements, fire, air, water and earth, and we are a part of this world too. Our humours are blood, phlegm, yellow bile and black bile. If you have an imbalance of these elements then your body will be ill.

In this cold weather, I have too much phlegm. It is oozing out of my nose as my body is so imbalanced. I need heat and dryness to balance my cold and wet humours, so I will take pepper to heal my body.

Demons and witches cause so much death in mass outbreaks of disease. They are pure evil and kill children, women and strong men alike. It is important to seek out the evil people behind the outbreaks and execute them before they do more harm.

We must keep our towns clean. The bad smells make people ill; this is called miasma. If there is waste, dead animals and filth around, people will breathe in this stench. This bad air makes people ill. If the air smells bad, it will make you ill.