

# INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF UNANI AND INTEGRATIVE MEDICINE



E-ISSN: 2616-4558  
P-ISSN: 2616-454X  
<https://www.unanijournal.com>  
IJUIM 2024; 8(1): 07-10  
Impact Factor (RJIF): 6.3  
Peer Reviewed Journal  
Received: 08-01-2024  
Accepted: 20-02-2024

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## History of hygiene: An overview

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**DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.33545/2616454X.2024.v8.i2a.274>

### Abstract

Hygiene refers to conditions and practises that help to maintain health and prevent the spread of diseases. Hygiene is a multifaceted Pandora's box of dubious information. Filth, disease, bugs, germs, filthy private habits, ideas about compulsive cleanliness, and coercive states enforcing mental and racial hygiene are all present. The concept of hygiene is different according to the different people. Hand washing was considered a religious practise in early Egyptian period. The majority of Egyptians bathed in the Nile River once a day. Showers were available to the wealthy Egyptians. The Roman aqueducts were a crowning technological achievement of the ancient world. Prior to the invention of soap, people were scrubbed clean with a tool known as a strigil. During the Middle Ages, it became customary to wash one's hands before eating. Soap was brought from the East by knights during the Crusades. In the late-19th century, people began to realize the relationship between cleanliness and good health. The aim of this paper is to discuss about hygiene, history of hygiene and importance of hygiene in different civilization and evolution of hygiene process from 3000 BC up to 2018 AD.

**Keywords:** Hygiene, crusades, strigil

### Introduction

The term "hygiene" is derived from "Hygeia," the Greek goddess of health. It is defined as the science of health and encompasses all factors that contribute to a healthy lifestyle <sup>[1]</sup>. "Hygiene refers to conditions and practises that help to maintain health and prevent the spread of diseases," according to the World Health Organization (WHO). Personal hygiene is the practise of keeping one's body clean. Hygiene is a multifaceted Pandora's box of dubious information. Filth, disease, bugs, germs, filthy private habits, ideas about compulsive cleanliness, and coercive states enforcing mental and racial hygiene are all present. It also includes images of spotless kitchens and bathrooms. Different fields have different concepts of hygiene. According to the mother, hygiene is about keeping her children and home clean and tidy <sup>[2]</sup>. Hygiene, according to the microbiologist, is about avoiding germs and disease. According to the Historian, hygiene originally meant health and gradually became more private and specific over the two millennia for which we have records. An anthropologist looks at hygiene from one of two perspectives:

- **The Emic-** Emic being the perspective of the ordinary person practicing their scrubbing and anointings.
- **The Etic** – Etic being the perspective of the scientist, objectively studying and categorizing human habits <sup>[3]</sup>.

### Antiquity of hygiene

Because water was required for farming, most ancient peoples lived near rivers or other sources of fresh water. Washing one's hands was a religious practise for many early Egyptians. Egyptian priests washed their hands four times a day. This action represented spiritual purity. The majority of Egyptians bathed in the Nile River once a day. Showers were available to the wealthy Egyptians. They were shallow stone trays that were connected to underground waste storage jars. Servants poured water over a person standing in the stone tray. Despite the fact that early Rome had aqueducts to bring in water and sewers to transport waste, only the Roman aristocracy could afford the luxury of indoor toilets. The Roman aqueducts were a crowning technological achievement of the ancient world. Rome's first aqueduct was built in 312 B.C., and many more would be built over the next five centuries. <sup>[4]</sup> The city of Rome had about 150 public toilets, known as latrines. Toilet seats were arranged side by side above a running water trough. There was no toilet paper available.

We were told that sponges on sticks were provided and that they were rinsed after each use. Historians believe that these public latrines (With no privacy) were a gathering place for people to chat and make social connections. (There goes the embarrassment factor.) Cleanliness was painful and strange at this time in history. Prior to the invention of soap, people were scrubbed clean with a tool known as a strigil. The strigil was used to scrape off the perfumed oil that had been applied to the skin. A strigil was a small, curved metal tool that was used to scrape dirt, sweat, and oil off the body. The wealthy frequently had slaves do this task for them. Because of his excessive use of the strigil, Emperor Augustus of Rome was said to have a face full of sores. "The greatest blessing, we can ask is a sane mind in a healthy body," wrote Juvenal, a Roman poet. Bathing on a regular basis kept the early Romans clean. Because most Roman homes lacked a bathroom, citizens went to a bathhouse. The bathhouse was a multi-room structure. Each room had its own pool, each with a different level of heat. Some were steam rooms, while others were warm or cold water pools. Women and men were required by law to bathe separately. By the third century A.D., Rome had nearly a thousand bathhouses. There were eleven public bathhouses with a total capacity of 1,600 bathers. (It's like our modern-day water park, but without the swimsuits!) By the Middle Ages, cleanliness did not appear to be a priority. There was superstition and ignorance everywhere, as well as diseases and rodent infestations. It was widely assumed that being naked and allowing the water to touch you would cause you to become ill. Public bathing, according to mediaeval church authorities, was the source of immorality and disease. Epidemic diseases such as the bubonic plague, typhus, smallpox, and tuberculosis's White Death claimed the lives of both young and old. Garbage and human waste were dumped on the streets. Pigs, cows, chickens, and other farm animals were free to roam the streets. People were trying to figure out why diseases were spreading. They soon discovered that frequent hand washing in warm water, wine, or vinegar was beneficial. That's when keeping clean became more important. Keeping clean at the time could mean the difference between life and death. The wealthy bathed more frequently than the average person. Pails of water were heated on the fire and carried to the bathtub in a castle. As you might expect, this took some time. Bathwater was sometimes infused with flower petals, perfumes, or scented oils. The average citizen used the same bathwater for each member of the family before discarding it. The youngest was usually last. Peasants did not usually have the luxury of a bath. They bathed in the river when it was warm enough. During the middle Ages, it became customary to wash one's hands before eating. Soap was brought from the East by knights during the Crusades. There were no drains or clean water supplies in mediaeval towns. Garbage and manure had been dumped in the streets [5].

#### Time line

**3500–3000 BC:** Babylonians and Egyptians start making toothbrushes by fraying the end of a twig.

**3000 BC:** The Ancient Egyptians invented the first toothbrush, a stick with one end flayed to soften the wood fibres. It is also said that Egyptians used tooth powder made of powdered ox hoof ashes, myrrh, powdered burnt egg shells, and pumice. The ancient Egyptians would also freshen their breath by chewing on fragrant honey mixtures

[6].

**2800 BC:** The earliest documented evidence of the manufacture of soap-like materials comes from this period in ancient Babylon [7].

**2200 BC:** On a Babylonian clay tablet was written a soap formula consisting of water, alkali, and cassia oil [8].

**1700 BC:** In Knossos, Crete, palatial bathrooms with water supplied by terra cotta pipes were constructed [9].

**1600 BC–1550 BC:** The Ebers' papyrus, an ancient Egyptian medical compendium, describes the practise of combining oils with alkaline salts to form a soap-like material for treating skin diseases and washing. The papyrus shows that the ancient Egyptians bathed on a regular basis. Egyptian documents also mention a soap-like substance being used in the preparation of wool for weaving [10].

**600 BC:** The Phoenicians make soap from goat's tallow and wood ashes [11].

**500 BC:** Hand washing five times a day, hair washing every third day, and a hot bath every fifth day were all part of Chinese gentlemanly etiquette.

**460 BC – 377 BC:** "Hygiene" becomes known as the branch of medicine dedicated to the "art of health," (As distinct from therapeutics, the treatment of disease. Hippocrates, the Greek physician, defines hygiene as "the influence of the atmosphere, soil, and water on human health [12]."

**312 BC:** Perfumed oils are used for bathing in Rome. Wet skin is also rubbed with pumice and ashes [9].

**47 AD:** Scribonius Largus, a Roman physician, describes three different "toothpowder" mixtures, one with vinegar, honey, and salt, another with radish and finely ground glass, and a third with ground deer antler, a rare aromatic gum, and rock salt [14].

**100 – 200 AD:** Galen, A Greek physician, suggests soap for cleaning and medicinal purposes [15].

**200 BC–450 AD:** Several Hindu texts, including the Manu smriti and the Vishnu Purana, describe elaborate hygiene codes. Bathing is one of the five Nitya karmas (Daily duties) in Hinduism, and failure to perform it is considered sinful by some scriptures [16].

**300 – 500 AD:** As an alternative to soap, Indian women were use a turmeric cream with antiseptic properties [17].

**600 – 700 AD:** The "Turkish Bath," or Hammam, becomes an important aspect of Islamic culture. The Quran emphasises the importance of cleanliness in Muslim faith, requiring face, hand, forearm, and foot washing before prayer and whole-body bathing after sex [18].

Palestine, Iraq, Iran, Italy, Spain and France are the early centres of soapmaking, using vegetable and animal oils combined with ashes and fragrance.

**1000–1200 AD:** Bathing is essential to the Western

European upper class. "The Cluniac monasteries to which they resorted or retired were always provided with bathhouses, and even the monks were required to take full immersion baths twice a year, at the two Christian festivals of renewal, though exhorted not to uncover themselves from under their bathing sheets <sup>[19]</sup>.

**1100s:** In England, soap is heavily taxed. It is regarded as a luxury item and is rarely used <sup>[20]</sup>.

**1240s:** Gilbertus Anglicus, an English physician, publishes his *Compendium Medicinæ*, which includes descriptions of hygiene and personal grooming <sup>[21]</sup>.

**1400s:** The first precursor of the modern toothbrush is thought to come from China or Egypt in this century. It has a bamboo or bone handle and bristles from the back of the neck of the wild boar or horsehair. This design would spread to Europe <sup>[22]</sup>.

**1500s – 1600s:** England had adopted "dry cleaning," in which the rubbing action of linen underclothing replaced bathing. Underwear is aired or washed <sup>[23]</sup>.

**1600s – 1700s:** King Louis XIV, one of Europe's most powerful men at the time, bathed twice in his lifetime. Both were prescribed by his doctor to treat seizures, but neither worked and instead left him with headaches. Most people in lower social classes never bathed. Ward claims that the upper and middle classes kept clean by regularly washing their undergarments <sup>[24]</sup>. Puritans in the United States prioritize cleanliness, with Sunday washing linked to spiritual cleansing. Cleanliness become linked to respectability and moral virtue.

**1800s:** Throughout the century, public baths proliferated, allowing people of all socioeconomic backgrounds to use them. The development of plumbing and bathrooms where bathing could be a private activity were the innovations that allowed bathing to spread, according to Ward. The other component was the development of germ theory, or the idea that microbes cause disease and that washing one's body and clothes could thus protect one from potentially fatal illnesses. A weekly bath was once thought to be appropriate <sup>[25]</sup>.

Early colonial traders in India discover shampoo, a hair and body massage, and introduce it to Europe <sup>[26]</sup>.

**1847:** Ignaz Semmelweis, a Hungarian obstetrician, urges doctors at Vienna General Hospital to wash their hands. Previously, doctors were unaware of the spread of infections caused by a lack of hand washing <sup>[27]</sup>.

**1900:** The corporate takeover of cleanliness began in the twentieth century. Because soap and detergent had low profit margins, companies aggressively marketed their products. Through Hollywood stars, the company tenable cleanliness to beauty, youth, and love. Products ranging from deodorant and toothpaste to shaving supplies took advantage of the concept as well. "Soap and detergent manufacturers have been the leading definers of body care," Ward says. "You don't wash just for your own sake and health" <sup>[28]</sup>.

**1914:** Kasey Hebert (Hair stylist) invented the first

commercial shampoo in London <sup>[29]</sup>.

**1928:** In Europe, toilet paper was first sold in rolls <sup>[30]</sup>.

**1930:** Shampoo as we know it today (with synthetic surfactants) was introduced for the first time <sup>[31]</sup>.

**1952:** The American Journal of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene is formed <sup>[32]</sup>.

**1965:** The first anti-perspirant aerosol was launched to the market <sup>[33]</sup>. Fortunately, the first antiperspirant, ever dry, was introduced in 1903 and used aluminium salts to block pores and inhibit sweating. However, these early antiperspirants caused skin irritation, so in 1941 Jules Montenier patented a more modern formulation of antiperspirant that reduced irritation and was released to the market as Stopette. In 1965, the first antiperspirant aerosol deodorant was introduced. However, due to health and environmental concerns, antiperspirant sprays have declined in popularity, and stick deodorants and antiperspirants are now the most popular <sup>[34]</sup>.

**1975–1980:** Sleep hygiene was developed as an accepted behavioural and environmental practise to promote better sleep quality. This suggestion was intended to assist people suffering from mild to moderate insomnia. However, evidence for the effectiveness of individual recommendations was "limited and inconclusive" as of 2014 <sup>[13]</sup>.

**1989:** David P. Strachan (British epidemiologist) developed the hygiene hypothesis, which states that there is an inverse relationship between family size and the development of atopic allergic disorders – the more children in a family, the less likely they are to develop these allergies <sup>[33]</sup>.

**1990:** The WHO/UNICEF Joint Monitoring Programme for Water Supply, Sanitation and Hygiene (JMP) launches regular estimates of national, regional and global progress on drinking water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) <sup>[33]</sup>.

**2000s:** According to Ward, dermatologists, epidemiologists, and consumers have expressed scepticism about extreme bathing practises, particularly the effects of soap on the skin. There was also a growing recognition that exposure to microbes as a child was necessary for the development of a strong immune system. As a result, perhaps the twenty-first century will see a return to our pungent past <sup>[20]</sup>.

**2008:** The Public Private Partnership for Handwashing (PPPHW) established Global Handwashing Day in August 2008 during the annual World War <sup>[34]</sup>.

**2009:** The World Health Organization has released its New Global Guidelines on Hand Hygiene in Health Care, which were developed with the help of over 100 renowned international experts. Also tested and trialled in various parts of the world <sup>[13]</sup>.

**2015:** 892 million people practised open defecation <sup>[32]</sup>.

**2018:** According to a study conducted by the University Of Connecticut School Of Medicine, dryers sucking in bacteria and faeces from flushing toilets can spread it onto users' recently washed hands <sup>[20]</sup>.

## Conclusion

Hygiene is a complex Pandora's box of a topic, full of doubtful stuff we'd rather not confront. It contains filth and disease, bugs, germs and grubby private habits. Adoption of hygiene method through different empire like in ancient Egyptians bathed regularly. The Eber's Papyrus, a medical document from about 1500 B.C describes combining animal and vegetable oils with alkaline salts to form a soap-like material used for treating skin diseases and it shows that evolution of hygiene from 3500 BC up to 1800 AD and it shows all the procedure that discovered year wise. The WHO/UNICEF launches Joint Monitoring Programme for Water Supply, Sanitation and Hygiene (JMP) launches regular estimates of national, regional and global progress on drinking water, sanitation and hygiene.

## Conflict of Interest

Not available

## Financial Support

Not available

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### How to Cite This Article

firdaus S, Ammar Ibne Anwar. History of hygiene: An overview. International Journal of Unani and Integrative Medicine. 2024;8(1):07-10.

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