

THE TEACHINGS OF HIPPOCRATES (1)

BY David L. Duffy, MD

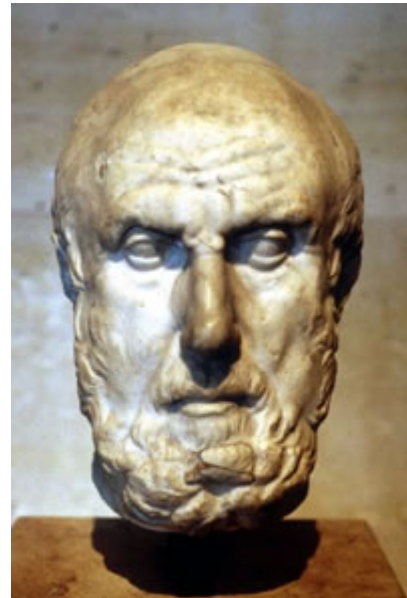
Hippocrates is known as the as the Father of Medicine. He was born in 460 B.C. In one of his writings called "Tradition in Medicine" he discusses the scientific aspects of medicine. In this article we will examine some of the observations and theories and compare them with the teachings of Arnold Ehret. [See Hippocratic Writings, edited by G.E.R. Lloyd, Penguin Classics, New York, 1978].



Hippocrates describes the discovery of cooking foods to improve their digestion:

If sick men fared just as well eating and drinking and living exactly as healthy men do, and no better on some different regimen, there would be little need for the science. But the reason why the art of medicine became necessary was because sick men did not get well on the same regimen as the healthy, any more than they do now. (Hippocratic Writings, p. 71)

The produce of the earth, fruits, vegetables and grass, is the food of animals on which they grow and flourish without needing other articles of diet. In the beginning I believe that man lived on such food and the modern diet is the result of many years' discovery. Such devising was necessary because, in primitive times, men often suffered terribly from their indigestible and animal-like diet, eating raw and uncooked food, difficult to digest. (Hippocratic Writings, p. 72)



Hippocrates

For this reason I believe these primitive men sought food suitable to their constitutions and discovered that which we now use. Thus, they took wheat and wetted it, winnowed it, ground it, sifted it, and then mixed it and baked it into bread, and likewise made cakes from barley. They boiled and baked and mixed and diluted the strong raw foods with the weaker ones and subjected them to many other processes, always with a view to man's nature and his capabilities. They knew that if strong food was eaten the body could not digest it and thus it would bring about pain, sickness, and death, whereas the body draws nourishment and thus grows and is healthy from food it is able to digest. What fairer or more fitting name can be given to such research and discovery than that of medicine, which was founded for the health, caused pain, sickness and death? (Hippocratic Writings, p. 72)

Arnold Ehret made a similar point in his discussion of raw and cooked foods:

The entire effect or benefit from raw food is the rough fiber of uncooked vegetables, which relieves constipation, and acts as an ideal "mucus broom" in the intestines. I do not believe that the human body assimilates "food-value vegetables" such as cauliflower, asparagus, turnips, potatoes, or cereals in their uncooked state. After a certain beneficial mechanical cleansings of the bowels through these raw foods the one-sided raw-food eater lacks, in fact the most important food substance, and that is grape or fruit sugar, unless he eats sufficient fruits. Raw fruits, and if desired, raw green-leaf vegetables form the ideal food of man. That is the mucusless diet.

But the mucusless diet as a healing system uses raw, rough vegetables for their cleansing qualities, baked ones as food, and baked and stewed fruits as a LESS AGGRESSIVE DISSOLVER of poisons and mucus to MODERATE THE ELIMINATION IN SEVERE CASES. This is one of the most important principles of the system, a point the raw-food fanatic ignores entirely. Eating raw potatoes, raw cereals, and unfired pies is, in my opinion, absurd and worse than if they are carefully baked, which means developing the starch into at least partly digestible gluten and grape sugar. [Arnold Ehret, Mucusless Diet Healing System, pp. 93, 94].

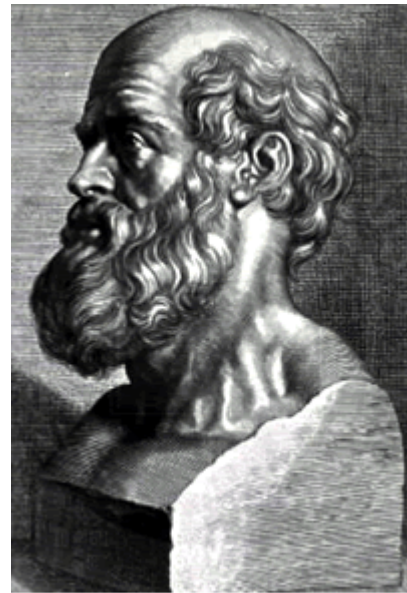
Hippocrates analyzes differences between food for the healthy person and food for the one who is sick:

As I have already said, I do not believe anyone would ever have looked for such a science if the same regimen were equally good for the sick and the healthy. Even now some people, the barbarians and some Greeks, who have no knowledge of medicine, go on behaving when they are ill just as they do in health. First of all, I imagine, they cut down the quantity without changes the quality of the food, making the sick eat very little. But when it became clear to them that such a regimen suited and helped some of the sick but not all, and that there were some even who were in such a condition that they could not digest even a very little food, then they concluded that in some cases a more easily digested food was necessary, Thus they invented gruel by mixing a little strong food with much water, so taking away its strength by dilution and cooking. For those that could not digest even gruel, they substituted liquid nourishment, taking care that this should be of moderate dilution and quantity, neither too weak nor too strong.

Hippocrates has noted the difference between "strong" and "weak" foods. He gives "weak" or more dilute foods to the sick. This is in line with what Ehret describes as "compensation-action". When the patient fasts or eats only a mucusless diet of fruits and vegetables the body can eliminate waste material and reverse the disease process. [Arnold Ehret, Mucusless Diet Healing System, pp 23, 241

Hippocrates now deepens his analysis:

It must be clearly understood, however, that gruel is not necessarily of assistance to everyone who is sick. In some diseases it is evident that on such a diet, the fever and pains increase, the gruel serving as nourishment to the disease, but as a source of decline and sickness to the body. In such cases were dry food to be taken, barley-cakes or bread for example, even in very small quantities, the patients would become ten times worse than they would be on a diet of gruel, simply because of the strength of the food.



Hippocrates

Again a man who was helped by gruel but not by dry food would be worse if he ate more of the latter than if he took only a little and even a small quantity would give him pain. In fact, it is obvious that all the causes of such pains come to the same thing; the stronger foods are the most harmful to man whether he be in health or sickness. (Hippocratic Writings, p. 73, 74)

Hippocrates makes the point that when a person discovers foods that help him feel better and foods that make him feel worse he is making scientific observations similar to what a physician should do. Hippocrates proposes that the whole science of medicine might be discovered by research according to these principles:

The one [i.e. sick person] sought to do away with those articles of diet which, on account of their savage and undiluted nature, the human frame could not digest, and on which it could not remain healthy; the other [i.e., the physician] discovered what a sick man could not digest in view of his particular malady (Hippocratic Writings, p. 74)

Hippocrates now describes the dangers of under-eating and over-eating:

If it were all as simple as this, that the stronger foods are harmful and the weaker good and nourishing for men both in health and sickness, the matter were an easy one. The safest course would be to keep to the weaker food.

But if a man were to eat less than enough he would make as big a mistake as if he were to eat too much. Hunger is a powerful agent in the human body; it can maim, weaken and kill. Under-nourishment gives rise to many troubles and, though they are different from those produced by over-eating, they are none the less severe because they are more diverse and more specific. One aims at some criterion as to what constitutes a correct diet, but you will find neither number nor weight to determine what this is exactly, and no other criterion than bodily feeling. Thus exactness is difficult to achieve and small errors are bound to occur. (Hippocratic Writings, p. 75)

That over-eating should cause no less sickness than excessive fasting is easily understood by reference to the healthy. Some find it better to dine but once a day and consequently make this their custom. Others, likewise, find it is better for them to have a meal both at noon and in the evening. Then there are some who adopt one or other of these habits merely because it pleases them, no because of chance circumstances. On the grounds of health it matters little to most people whether they take but one meal a day or two. But there are some who, if they do not follow their usual custom, do not escape the result and they may be stricken with a serious illness within a day. Some there are who, if they take luncheon when this practice does not agree with them, at once become both mentally and physically dull; they yawn and become drowsy and thirsty. If subsequently they should dine as well, they suffer from wind, colic, and diarrhea and, not infrequently, this has been the start of a serious illness even though they have taken no more than twice the amount of food they have been accustomed to.

Similarly, a man who is accustomed to taking luncheon because he finds that this agrees with him, cannot omit the meal without suffering great weakness, fear, and faintness. In addition, his eyes become sunken, the urine more yellow and warmer, the mouth bitter, and he has a sinking feeling in his stomach. He feels dizzy, despondent and incapable of exertion. Then later when he sits down to dine, food is distasteful to him, and he cannot eat his customary dinner. Instead the food causes colic and rumblings and burns the stomach; he sleeps poorly and is disturbed by violent nightmares. With such people this too has often been the start of some illness. (Hippocratic Writings, p. 75, 76)

Hippocrates explains these observations:

Let us consider the reason for these things. The man who is accustomed to dine only once a day suffers, in my opinion, when he takes an extra meal because he has not waited long enough since the last. His stomach has not fully benefited from the food taken on the previous day and has neither digested nor discarded it, nor calmed down again. This new food is introduced into the stomach while it is still digesting and fermenting the previous meal. Such stomachs are slow in digestion and need rest and relaxation.



The man who is accustomed to a meal at midday suffers when he has to go without, because his body needs nourishment and the food taken at the previous meals has already been used up. If no fresh food be taken his body wastes through starvation, and I attribute to this the symptoms from which I described such a man to suffer. I maintain that other healthy people will suffer from these same troubles if they fast for two or three days.

Hippocrates' observations are very interesting. Ehret described this phenomenon in his discussion on the effects of fasting:

When you fast you eliminate first and at once the primary obstructions of wrong and too much eating. This results in your feeling relatively good, or possibly even better than when eating, but, as previously explained, you bring new, secondary obstructions from your own waste in the circulation and you feel miserable. You and everyone else blame the lack of food. The next day you can notice with certainty mucus in the urine and when the quantity of waste, taken in the circulation, is eliminated, you will undoubtedly feel fine, even stronger than ever before. [Arnold Ehret, Mucusless Diet Healing System, pp. 144,145]



Hippocrates

In the writings of Hippocrates which we have examined in this article he describes the role of the physician to research the effect of diet in promoting health and treating disease. When Arnold Ehret was sick with kidney disease he followed the same pattern which Hippocrates described. Ehret cured himself and went onto cure others. In future articles we will continue to study and appreciate the brilliance of Hippocrates.

About the author:

Dr. David L. Duffy, MD graduated from Harvard Medical School in 1971. He trained in Internal Medicine and Ambulatory Care at Montefiore Medical Center, Bronx, NY, from 1971 - 1975. He continued seeing patients and supervising interns and residents at the Montefiore Medic Clinic until 1980. From 1981-1988 he had a private medical practice in Oceanside, California. In 1988 he returned to New York to work at Metropolitan Hospital Center in Manhattan. From 1996 to 2005 he served as Section Chief of General Internal Medicine. He also served as Chairman of the Patient Education Committee from 1999 to 2005. His medical office is located at 27-10 30th Avenue, Suite LA, Astoria, NY 11102. Astoria is in a section of Queens County, NY a part of New York City. Dr. Duffy is only available by appointment. Dr. Duffy can be reached by phone at 718-932-9870. Dr. Duffy will not be available for phone, fax, mail or e-mail consultations.

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