

## Topic Page: [Hippocrates](#)

Definition: **Hippocrates** from *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate(R) Dictionary*

 [pronunciation](#)

Hippocrates ca460– ca377 b.c. *father of medicine* Greek physician

### Summary Article: **Hippocrates**

From *The Columbia Encyclopedia*

(hĭpŏk'rĕtēz), c.460–c.370 B.C., Greek physician, recognized as the father of medicine. He is believed to have been born on the island of Cos, to have studied under his father, a physician, to have traveled for some time, perhaps studying in Athens, and to have then returned to practice, teach, and write at Cos. The Hippocratic or Coan school that formed around him was of enormous importance in separating medicine from superstition and philosophic speculation, placing it on a strictly scientific plane based on objective observation and critical deductive reasoning.

Although Hippocrates followed the current belief that disease resulted from an imbalance of the four bodily humors, he maintained that the disturbance was influenced by outside forces and that the humors were glandular secretions. He believed that the goal of medicine should be to build the patient's strength through appropriate diet and hygienic measures, resorting to more drastic treatment only when the symptoms showed this to be necessary. This was in contrast to the contemporary Cnidian school, which stressed detailed diagnosis and classification of diseases to the point of ignoring the patient. Hippocrates probably had an inkling of Mendelian and genomic factors in heredity, because he noted not only many of the signs of disease but also that symptoms could appear throughout a family or a community, or even over successive generations.

Of the large collection of writings that derived from the Coan school, only a few are generally ascribed to Hippocrates himself, although his influence is felt throughout. Of these, *The Aphorisms*, summing up his observations and deductions, and *Airs, Waters, and Places*, which recognized a link between environment and disease, are considered the most important. The collection has appeared in a number of translations, notably that of Littré.

While the **Hippocratic oath** cannot be directly credited to him either, it undoubtedly represents his ideals and principles. The oath, which still governs the ethical conduct of physicians today, is often recited at the graduation ceremonies of medical schools. Among other things the oath details codes of patients's right to privacy, asks the physician to pledge to lead an honorable personal and professional life, and requires that he or she prescribe treatments only for curative purposes.

See studies by W. Smith (1979) and W. Heidel (1981).

**APA**

Chicago

Harvard

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Hippocrates. (2018). In P. Lagasse, & Columbia University, *The Columbia encyclopedia* (8th ed.). New York, NY: Columbia University Press. Retrieved from <https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/hippocrates>

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## APA

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## Chicago

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## Harvard

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## MLA

"Hippocrates." *The Columbia Encyclopedia*, Paul Lagasse, and Columbia University, Columbia University Press, 8th edition, 2018. *Credo Reference*, <https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/hippocrates>. Accessed 19 Oct. 2019.