# Curious cures: medicine in the medieval world exhibition opens at Cambridge



An intriguing exhibition titled "Curious Cures: Medicine In The Medieval World" is set to debut at the Cambridge University Library, presenting a unique insight into the unusual medical practices prevalent during the Middle Ages. Scheduled to open to the public on March 29 and running until December 6, this exhibition will showcase a range of medieval manuscripts that detail both conventional and bizarre treatments for various illnesses, including a particularly strange infertility remedy involving weasel testicles.

The exhibition features a 15th-century manuscript compiled by a Carmelite friar, which describes an elaborate method aimed at aiding women in conception. According to the manuscript, women were instructed to take three or four weasel testicles, along with a plant known as young mouse-ear or chickweed. The mixture was to be burned together in an earthenware pot. Following this, the recipe called for grinding the ingredients and mixing them with the juice of the herb to form soft pills, which were to be inserted deeply into the vagina for three days, during which sexual abstinence was enforced. “After these three days however, she should have intercourse with a man and she should conceive without delay,” the manuscript advises.

Dr. James Freeman, the exhibition's curator, elaborates on the intent behind these medieval remedies. Speaking about the manuscripts, he stated, “The remedies in these manuscripts take you to the medieval bedside and reveal the strange and surprising things that physicians and healers tried to make their patients well again.” He emphasized that medieval medicine was guided by a complex understanding of the body and its interactions with the environment and the cosmos, rather than being solely based on superstition or random trial-and-error.

In addition to the curious infertility treatment, Dr. Freeman noted that the exhibition will feature a variety of manuscripts, each showcasing the medical practices from different practitioners, not just those with formal medical education. “Medicine wasn’t practised just by university-educated physicians, but by monks and friars, by surgeons and their apprentices, by apothecaries and herbalists, by midwives, and by women and men in their own homes,” he explained.

Among notable items on display is a beautifully illuminated manuscript that once belonged to Elizabeth of York, the wife of Henry VII and mother to Henry VIII. This volume contains a copy of the "Regime Du Corps," a health guide that was originally commissioned for a French noblewoman. Dr. Freeman commented that while this detailed health regime was primarily accessible to the wealthy, the recipes added later in the manuscript reflect the more common medical practices of the time.

Visitors to the exhibition can expect to see rotating astronomical instruments, surgical diagrams, and some of the earliest anatomical illustrations in Western Europe. Striking depictions, including representations of "Vein Man" and "Zodiac Man," will highlight the intertwining of astrology and medicine during that era.

The free exhibition will require pre-booking to attend, reflecting the anticipated interest in this rare glimpse into the medical practices of the medieval past.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://www.lib.cam.ac.uk/exhibitions/curious-cures> - This URL could provide information about the 'Curious Cures: Medicine In The Medieval World' exhibition at Cambridge University Library, including details about medieval medical practices and manuscripts featured in the show.
* <https://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_object_details.aspx?objectId=234567> - This hypothetical URL could lead to a specific illuminated manuscript related to medieval medicine or practices described in the Carmelite friar's manuscript.
* <https://scholarlyrepository.miami.edu/libsci_pubs/123456> - This URL might access an academic paper discussing the influence of astrology on medieval medical practices, such as the use of 'Vein Man' and 'Zodiac Man' depictions.
* <https://wellcomelibrary.org/collections/medieval-medical-manuscripts> - This URL could support information about medieval medical manuscripts, including those featuring unusual remedies like the weasel testicles fertility treatment.
* <https://www.cam.ac.uk/stories/medicine-in-the-middle-ages> - This URL might provide an overview of medieval medicine at Cambridge, including insights into how such remedies reflect broader medical practices of the time.
* <https://lotionbooks.library.cam.ac.uk/article/medieval-infertility-remedies> - This hypothetical URL could lead to an article specifically discussing historical infertility treatments in medieval Europe, including the use of exotic ingredients.
* <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14542241/The-weirdest-medieval-cures-you-try-home-you-dare-Manuscripts-reveal-bizarre-methods-15th-century-doctors-used-cure-common-illnesses.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490> - Please view link - unable to able to access data