Fourteenth-century advice on what to do to avoid becoming ill with the plague:

Repent, pray, do penance for your sins.

Give alms and settle debts.

Take part in the organized religious processions to mosques and churches for communal worship and prayer.

Order unmarried men and women living together to marry or break off their relationship, and prohibit swearing and work on the Sabbath.

Punish yourself by whipping; your pain may pay for sin.

Carry on your person inscriptions embodying the sacred names of God.

Do not flee, for God has commanded good Muslims to await their fate.

Flee, preferably to mountains, clean air, and isolated places.

Confine the sick to their own homes.

Limit the number of people who can attend a funeral or meet together in public places.

Burn the clothes, bedding, and possessions of the diseased.

Bury bodies at least 6 feet deep, and cover with lime before replacing earth.

Avoid congested areas.

Do not buy cloth made in regions or from persons known to be infected.

Maintain morale by reading entertaining love-stories or humorous tales.

Avoid fear, worry, sadness, anger.

Do not ring the church bells for funerals and stop the town-crier or trumpeter making public announcements.

Break up the air inside your home by ringing bells and releasing birds, then chasing them so they fly around the room.

Cover windows with waxed cloth or better still glaze them.

Do not bathe, for this opens the pores to the air.

Burn aromatic woods in your home.

Periodically, throw a powdered mixture of sulphur and arsenic on your fire.

Pile sweet-smelling shrubs around the boundaries of cities.

Fill your house with pleasant-smelling flowers, sprinkled with vinegar and rose-water.

Inhale hand held “smelling apples” made of mixtures of black pepper, roses, amber, camphor, myrrh, and sweet basil bound together with a paste of gum Arabic.

Breathe in the smell of sewage.

Spend time in smoky and stinking places.

Burn green wood in your fireplace and outdoors, so it will smoke.



Medieval illustration showing the burning of plague victims’ clothing.

Marjorie Rowling, *Everyday Life in Medieval Times*

(New York: Dorset Press, 1968), 187.

Regulate butchers and meat-sellers, to ensure that what is sold is fresh.

Butcher large animals outside city limits.

Avoid both fasting and eating to excess.

Purge the body with laxatives.

Draw off impure or excessive blood by bleeding.

Wash your hands and face often with vinegar and water, or with warm wine.

Rest as much as possible, with moderate exercise in good weather.

Drink light white wine mixed with boiled water, or water taken from a swift-flowing stream over a rocky bottom.

Drink sour fluids or fruit juice.

Drink syrup of roses mixed with powdered coral, precious stones, and bones from the heart of a stag to strengthen the heart.

Eat a pickled onion every day before breakfast.

Drink deep red Armenian clay mixed with water.

Force anyone entering the city who carries any powders or ointments to swallow them.

Kill Jews, foreigners, gypsies, beggars, and lepers.

What to do to cure those who have the disease:

Put an old rooster cut through the back to flatten it, or a poultice of mustard and lily bulbs, on the buboes (swellings).

Cover buboes with clay.

Sear buboes with red-hot iron.

Cut open and drain buboes, treating them like ulcers.

Surgically remove buboes.

Bathe buboes with vinegar or chamomile water.

Write God’s name on the inside of a cup, pour in water. When ink has dissolved, have sick person drink it.

Give the sick fruit juices and extract of violets to drink.

Draw off impure or excessive blood by bleeding.

Source: Adapted from Marjorie Rowling, *Everyday Life in Medieval Times* (New York: Dorset Press, 1968), 187.

**Which of these pieces of advice do you find the strangest? Why?**

**Which would be the hardest to follow? Why?**

**Which would be the most useful? Why?**