Many of the outdated treatments described in the foregoing sections were based largely on the theories practiced by Aelius Galenus, “Galen,” a Greek physician of the second century C.E. According to prevailing thought, health was based on balancing the four humors of the body—black bile, yellow bile, blood and phlegm. Accordingly, treatments were designed to rid the body of the humor or humors in excess. For example:

**Bloodletting** was thought to reduce the heat produced by blood.

**Blistering** was an attempt to draw out certain bad humors, usually by applying caustic substances like a mustard plaster to the skin. The blister was then drained, supposedly removing the offending toxins.

**Clyster** was a generic term for an enema. **Calomel** and **castor oil** were medicinal means of inducing diarrhea.

**Purge** was a term for those procedures and medicines that produced either vomiting or diarrhea.