

The elephant in the room: is misuse of *Eau de Cologne* the missing link in the death of Napoleon ?

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Conspiracy theories about Napoleon Bonaparte's death started immediately after his death on the 5th of May 1821. A publication in *Nature* suggested he was murdered by arsenic poisoning due to detection of high arsenic levels in his hair [1] although this was refuted by later research. The 'elephant in the room' is Napoleon's misuse of *Eau de Cologne* that has not been discussed in terms of its toxic effects. He consumed 2-3 bottles daily. It was rubbed on his body, poured on his head, and he drank and inhaled it as medication. After his death, Napoleon's body was washed with *Eau de Cologne* [2] which contains 2-5% essential oils from citrus fruits and other plants dissolved in alcohol. Essential oils can act as endocrine disruptors [3] and many of the symptoms displayed by Napoleon can be attributed to this, including him developing breasts and having a hairless body. His suffering from seizures and feeling cold all the time can also be attributed to endocrine disrupting effects of the essential oils. Many years of exposure to excessively high concentrations of essential oil may have led him to develop gastric cancer. There are studies linking essential oil and endocrine disrupting chemicals to gastrointestinal cancer.

Eau de Cologne was a double-edged sword for Napoleon. Due to its high alcohol content, its antiseptic property protected him from bacterial and viral infections during his military campaigns but the endocrine disrupting property of essential oils caused changes in his physical appearance, leading to illness and eventually death.

References:

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- [2] Weider, B. and Hapgood, D., 1998. *The murder of Napoleon*. iUniverse., pp. 4
- [3] Henley, D.V., Lipson, N., Korach, K.S. and Bloch, C.A., 2007. Prepubertal gynecomastia linked to lavender and tea tree oils. *New England Journal of Medicine*, 356(5), pp.479-485.