

Modern Embalming in the United States

Directions: Read the following information about modern day embalming in the United States. On a separate piece of paper, compare and contrast current embalming practices in the US, and embalming practices of Ancient Egypt. A Venn Diagram is an easy way to compare and contrast.

Modern embalming is performed for three reasons.

1. The primary purpose of embalming is disinfection. Embalming a body keeps bacteria and diseases from growing. Persons coming in direct contact with the unembalmed body can become infected as well as there being the possibility of flies or other agents transferring pathogens to humans and infecting them.
2. The second purpose of embalming is preservation. Through embalming, the living family members are able to take care of the funeral affairs without the unpleasant affects of a decomposing body.
3. The third purpose of embalming is restoration. Returning the body to a life-like appearance has received many critics, but the custom of viewing the body after death in a state of rest remains a practice of proven psychological worth.

The normal steps to preparation of the body consists of:

- The body is placed in a proper position on the embalming table with the arms laid over the stomach..
- The body is washed and disinfected.
- The face is shaved as necessary.
- The eyes are closed. This is usually accomplished with a small curved plastic disc called an "eye cap" placed under the eyelid. Perforations in the cap help hold the eye lid in place.
- The mouth is closed. This is usually accomplished by the placing of a specially designed "tack" in the upper and lower jaw. Each tack has a fine wire attached. By twisting the two wires together, the jaw is thus closed and the lips are set to the natural lip line using a cream to retain the proper position and to prevent dehydration.
- The embalming solution is prepared. The modern embalming machine consists of a 2-3 gallon reservoir and an electric pump. A solution of approximately 8 ounces of fluid to 1 gallon water is prepared.
- An incision is made over the carotid artery (where the neck meets the shoulder) or over the femoral artery (in the leg at the groin). The artery and vein are located and isolated.
- A tube which is attached to the machine is inserted into the artery. A slightly larger tube is placed into the accompanying vein. This tube is attached to a hose to the sewer system.
- The fluid is injected into the artery under pressure by the embalming machine. As the blood is displaced by the fluid going in, it is forced out of the vein tube and disposed of. The pressure forces the embalming fluid into the capillaries and eventually to the cells of the body. After approximately 3 gallons of solution are injected into the body, the blood has thinned and the fluid coming through the vein tube is mostly embalming fluid.
- The tubes are removed and the incision sutured.

- The abdominal cavity is treated by the use of a hollow tube called a trocar that is used to aspirate gases and liquid contents under suction. A preservative chemical is introduced.
- The body is again washed and cream is placed on the hands and face to prevent dehydration.
- The hair is shampooed and the finger nails cleaned.
- The body is covered with a sheet awaiting dressing and placement in the casket.
- Cosmetics are later applied to replace the natural color removed by the embalming process, much of which is created by blood in facial capillaries that is no longer present. In the case of women, cosmetics used in life may also be used to recreate the "look" the person had during life. The hair is combed or set.

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Alaska State Standards: History A – A student should understand that history is a record of human experiences that links the past to the present and the future. History B – A student should understand historical themes through factual knowledge of time, places, ideas, institutions, cultures, people, and events