

Lead may have hastened Beethoven's death

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An Austrian scientist says a sample of composer Ludwig van Beethoven's hair taken after his death indicates medical treatment hastened his death.

Christian Reiter of the Medical University of Vienna, Austria, says the amount of lead in Beethoven's bloodstream spiked every time his abdomen was punctured by a needle to drain fluid that may have been the result of cirrhosis, ScienceNOW Daily News reported Wednesday.

Reiter said lead salts used to clean the wound at the time of each puncture were probably to blame for the higher lead content in the composer's blood. He said the worsened lead poisoning probably contributed to Beethoven's cirrhosis and speeded up its progress until his death.

William Walsh, director of research at the Health Research Institute and Pfeiffer Treatment Center in Warrenville, Ill., has also conducted studies on Beethoven's hair, but came up with different lead levels in some cases than Reiter did. He said he will work with the other scientist to reach a consensus.

"The medical doctor actually may have killed (Beethoven) with lead poisoning," Walsh said.

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