
DRINKING CURE IN HUNGARY

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History of medicinal waters in Hungary

The use of Hungarian medicinal waters has two thousand histories but the separation of these waters started in the second half of 19 century and it was only the “Bath-Low” laid down in XVI act of 1929, that separated definitely the medicinal and mineral waters from each other, and only the departmental order of the Ministry of Health, published in 1986 drew a distinction between the internal and external use of the mineral waters.

In the historical Hungary, the work of Georgius Wernher was the one which first wrote about the domestic thermal springs and public bath. In Wernher’s book there is a reference to the consumption of medical waters as well, which means that in Hungary in the XV-XVI century patients consumed mineral water mainly for the sake of their recovery. The first domestic water analysis were made at the beginning of the 18th century, when in 1763 Maria Theresa, Austrian Empress and Hungarian Queen, ordered the analysis and examination of the Hungarian waters and she obligated the doctors of the countries and towns to draw up a list on and to analyse the mineral waters and to determine the curative effect thereof.

Some others continue this work : Justus János Torkos, József Jakab Winter, József Manes Osterreicher and Mátyus István Kibédi. In the first half of the 19th century, the Hungarian Academy of Sciences was formed which conducted a competition for the utilization of the mineral and medicinal waters in Hungary. The general work of József Török titled *The high-class medicinal waters and bathing-establishments of the two Hungarian motherlands* won this competition. In 1886, besides the monographic elaborations, Kornél Chyzel prepared the *Map of the health resorts and mineral waters of Hungary* containing more than 300 finding places of medicinal and mineral waters.

From among the chemists making the water analysis, Károly Than, Vilmos Hankó, Gyula Weszelszky and Béla Lengyel have to mentioned. At the beginning of 1900 mentioned must be made of the mineral water consumption connected to health resorts, for Hungary was the country of bathing resorts and spas that time. In 1911 the *Hungarian Bath-Guide* listed 86 bathing resorts of mineral waters of which were consumed orally too. At this time according to the records, yearly 13-15 million litres were exported ranging from America to Japan from the world famed Saxlehner’s Hunyadi János bitter water, which was analysed by the most famous chemist of that time (by the German Liebig Bunsen, Mohr Fresenius and by the Hungarian Balló). This medical water was bottled by the most up to date filling-machines of that time.

The exploratory drilling out of the city park on the Pest which took 9 and half years and were linked to the name Vilmos Zsigmondi take a special place in the history of the exploitation of mineral and medicinal waters. That time, this 970.5 metre long well was the second deepest drilled well in Europe and was considered as a curiosity with the water temperature of 74°C and 500 litres/minute water output. Following the First World War, Hungary lost of majority of its mineral and thermal springs. On this smaller territory of the country the prospective drillings for hydrocarbons, starting at the turn of the century, which often brought thermal water of excellent quality to the surface instead of oil helped a lot to discover new finding places for example, Hajdúszoboszló, Debrecen.

As a matter of course wells were also bored specifically with the intension of the exploring thermal spring too. In 1927 the well Anna in Szeged and in 1935-36 the well Magda II and Budapest Margaret Island were drilled as a result of the above mentioned process. In 1997 EU-conform order on bottled waters was elaborated considering partly the EU-directive and partly the new Codex Alimentarius Standard. In Hungary this draft ordered similarly to the EU-directive and to the Codex Alimentarius Standard, is being correctly or incorrectly criticized a lot from the side of hygiene and public health.

Sources of medicinal waters for external use in Hungary

Alsópáhok	
Balatonfüred	
Berekfürdő	
Bogács	
Budapest	Aquincum, Dagály, Dandár Margitsziget, Gellért, Thermál, Király, Pestszenterzsébet, Rudas, Széchenyi, Lukács, Újpest.
Bük	
Répcse	
Cserkeszőlő	
Csokonyavisonta	
Csongrád	
Debrecen	
Déaványa	
Gunaras	
Eger	
Érd	
Füzesgyarmat	
Gyomaendrőd	
Győr	
Gyula	
Hajdúnánás	
Hajdúszoboszló	
Harkány	

Hegykö	
Hévíz	
Igal	
Kaba	
Karcag	
Kehidakustány	
Kiskőrös	
Kiskunhalas	
Kiskunmajsa	
Komárom	
Lakitelek	
Lenti	
Lipót	
Makó	
Mesteri	
Mezőkövesd	
Mezőtúr	
Miskolctapolca	
Mórahalom	
Mosonmagyaróvár	
Nagyatád	
Nyíregyháza-Gyopáros	
Parádfürdő	
Sárvár	
Sopron-Balf	
Szeged	
Szentes	
Szolnok	
Tamási	
Tiszaújváros	
Tótkomlós	
Túrkeve	
Visegrád	
Zalaegerszeg	
Zalakaros	

Though it is possible that some of the medicinal waters for external use can have an internal application, only a few are accepted. They are transported from the well individually.

Sources of medicinal waters for internal use in Hungary

Bottled medicinal waters

Though bottling of medicinal waters in Hungary was started several hundred years ago, no major advancement is seen during the last decades (the name of the medicinal water is found in brackets).

- Budapest-Őrmező (Ferenc József, Hunyadi János)
- Bükfürdő (Salvus)
- Hajdúszoboszló (Pávai Vajna)
- Parád : Parádi víz (Csevice)
- Sósartyán (Jódaqua)
- Tiszajenő (Mira, Mira bébi)

Sources of medicinal waters consumed on spot

- Balatonfüred
- Balf
- Budapest (Dagály, Széchenyi, Lukács, Juventus, Attila, Hungaria springs)
- Eger (Szent József spring)
- Hajdúszoboszló
- Harkány
- Parádfürdő
- Szeged (Anna-spring)

Therapeutic use of medicinal waters of Hungary

Medicinal waters in Hungary fall in the following categories : simple thermal waters, simple carbonated waters, alkalic waters, lime waters, chlorous waters, bitter waters, ferrous waters, iodine-bromine waters, radioactive waters. Only part of them can be used for drinking cure. The most popular are the carbonated, alkalic, bitter and iodous waters.

The lack of favourable economical conditions discourages the exploitation of the numerous wells. Medicinal waters should be bottled on the spot which prevents therapeutic use of many medicinal waters. These waters are transported and consumed by the population and so they are not suitable for scientific studies. Though anecdotes are readily available, medical research on the effect of unbottled medicinal waters had only been done a couple of decades ago and with the methods of those days. Bottling was attempted at certain sources but this tentative eventually failed.

Effects of Hungarian medicinal waters on organ systems

Favourable effects have been noted in diseases of the oesophagus, gut, small intestine, pancreas and gall bladder. Gastro-oesophageal reflux, hypo-acidity, hyper-acidity, motility disorders of the gastro-intestinal tract, functional dyspepsia, enteritis and constipation are accepted indications (Csevice, Mira, Ferencz József, Hunyadi János, Salvus). Drinking cure is number one in the methods of gastroenterological rehabilitation.

Inflammations of the respiratory system (nose, pharynx, lower airways) can also be effectively treated.

Iodous waters have a beneficial effect on metabolic disorders like thyroid dysfunction, carbohydrate or lipid disorders, and they can also play an important preventive role in cardiologic diseases.

Evaluation, conclusions

The actual health care system, difficulties of pharmaceutical management, decrease of physician-patient interactions demand conceptual changes in the treatment of gastrointestinal, respiratory and metabolic diseases. The number of medical visits and drug consumption decrease in spite of unchanging tendencies in the prevalence of diseases, which necessitates the elaboration and generalisation of methods that are based on fewer visits and on the financial facilities of the population.

Prevention is emphasised at the same time, since financial restrictions in health care are major factors. Thus prevention, healthy life-style and mental relaxation may have a positive effect on the economical situation.

In this context the role of medicinal and mineral waters has to be reevaluated. Obviously they can not replace pharmaceutical drugs in the treatment of acute diseases, but they can be useful in chronic treatment, during convalescence or in prevention. Their correct application as a long-term cure should be diffused both in health care and among the population.

The first obstacle is that drinking cures are scarcely presented in medical and post-gradual training. The development of pharmaceutical industry during the last half century, low drug prices of the last decades made physicians forget about drinking cures and patients also favour pharmaceutical and surgical treatment.

Earlier, drinking cures proved to be effective, mainly when they were associated with environmental changes at the resort and when the cure was continued at home.

It has to be taken into consideration that our medicinal waters have not been subject to scientific research, lack of financial resources no controlled, randomised, double blind studies were possible. Thus the elaboration of protocols, their official acceptance and introduction are still awaited. The principle of drinking cure is not officially and legally supported, therefore a change in the general way of thinking is unobtainable without official health policy statements.

There is a strong theoretical background for the use of drinking cures in the treatment of gastrointestinal diseases. It is supported by recent international scientific literature and the scarce national observations. Different medicinal waters may be effective in the treatment of diseases of the oral cavity, oesophagus, stomach, small and large intestine, gall bladder, bile ducts, liver and pancreas.

A drinking cure may have favourable effects in metabolic diseases, like in lipid disorders, calcium, magnesium deficiencies, obesity, renal stones, immunological and thyroid disorders.

The countries of the Carpathian basin, like Hungary have a unique place in Europe with the treasure of the numerous medicinal and mineral water sources. Unfortunately it must be declared that we mismanage this treasure. Our medicinal waters used to be exported to several European countries in the 18th century and to the United States in the 19th century.

Currently the number of our bottled medicinal waters is six (Mira, Hunyadi János, Ferenc József, Mira bébi, Salvus and Jodaqua), these are a modest representation of the Hungarian treasure of medicinal waters. Besides, some dealers propose their mineral water for medical purposes, based anecdotal proofs.

Confirmation of the effects of the mentioned medicinal waters with modern methods is necessary, because of the strict regulations in the European Union.

Literature

Borszeki BG. *The history of the utilization of natural mineral waters in Hungary.* Ásványvizek, gyógyvizek, MÉTE Budapest, 1998.