

A history of anaesthetics

1798–1801

In Britain, Sir Humphry Davy first experiments with nitrous oxide as an anaesthetic.



1847
Chloroform is increasingly used in surgery and dentistry.

1771–1786

Joseph Priestly discovers oxygen and nitrous oxide; gases that would become popular anaesthetics.

1981

British anaesthetist Archie Brain invents a safer, more reliable way of delivering anaesthetics to a patient using his laryngeal mask.

1804

In Japan, Hanaoka Seishu creates his own general anaesthetic based on plants used in Chinese medicine.



1493–1541

Swiss physician, Paracelsus discovers laudanum; a painkilling drug served as an alcoholic drink.

1846

William Morton uses ether on a patient as anaesthetic while Dr John Collins Warren removes a tumour during a famous demonstration of painless surgery.



1805

German pharmacist assistant, Friedrich Serturner, discovers morphine; a painkilling drug.

AD 64

Dioscorides, a Greek surgeon in the Roman army, writes that mandrake root boiled in wine would numb soldiers' wounds.

4000 BC

Sumerians use opium poppy as an anaesthetic.

AD 160

In China, Hua Tuo performs surgery with his own general anaesthetic, mafeisan, a mixture of Chinese herbs and wine.

1600 BC

Acupuncture is used in China for pain relief.



1923

In the USA, Dr Isabella Herb administers ethylene gas as an anaesthetic.

1350

Incan shamans chew coca leaves mixed with vegetable ash then spit the paste into the wounds of patients to relieve pain.



600 BC

Indian doctor, Sushruta, uses wine with herbs to sedate his patients.