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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.

2250 BC
Babylonians use the henbane plant to relieve toothache.

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.

1846
William Morton uses ether on a patient as anaesthetic while Dr John Coblins Warren removes a tumour during a famous demonstration of painless surgery.

1493–1541
Swiss physician, Paracelsus discovers laudanum; a painkilling drug served as an alcoholic drink.

4000 BC
Sumerians use opium poppy as an anaesthetic.

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.

AD 160
In China, Hua Tuo performs surgery with his own general anaesthetic, mafeisan, a mixture of Chinese herbs and wine.

1350
Incan shamans chew coca leaves mixed with vegetable ash then spit the paste into the wounds of patients to relieve pain.

1923
In the USA, Dr Isabella Herb administers ethylene gas as an anaesthetic.

1600 BC
Acupuncture is used in China for pain relief.

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

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