

1771–1786

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

1798–1801

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

2250 BC

Babylonians use the henbane plant to relieve toothache.



1804

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

4000 BC

Sumerians use
opium poppy as an
anaesthetic.



1847

Chloroform is increasingly used
in surgery and dentistry.

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 Coblins Warren removes
a tumour during a famous
demonstration of painless surgery.

1805

German pharmacist assistant, Friedrich Serturmer, 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.



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.

600 BC

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

1600 BC

Acupuncture is used in China for pain relief.



AD 160

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



1981

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