

Five main medical discoveries of the 20th century

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The 20th century was defined in part by medical advancements that shaped the world we know today. Many of these medical innovations saved countless lives by preventing or curing illnesses, while other steps in medical history were not without their share of speculation and controversy. Through all of the medical breakthroughs, however, a handful stand out as the most important medical breakthroughs of the 20th century.

1) Artificial Heart Dutch-born medical researcher Willem J. Kolff invented the first artificial heart but it was an American doctor Robert Jarvik who in 1982 completed the design of the first permanently-implantable artificial heart-the Jarvik-7 made of Dacron polyester, plastic, and aluminum with an internal power system that ensured it consistently beat at least 100, 000 times a day pumping blood through the body. The Jarvik devices were implanted to sustain patients waiting for transplants.

2) Penicillin Penicillin was discovered accidentally by Sir Alexander Fleming in 1928 at St. Mary's hospital in London when he forgot to clean a Petri dish before leaving on vacation. Fleming's experimentation with the left-behind mold led him to discover its dissolving effects on the Staphylococcus aureus bacterium. Through further trials he discovered that a pure culture of the mold effectively killed the harmful bacteria.

3) The Human Genome Project The crusade to map all human genes began in 1990 and was completed in 2003. It has given us a revolutionary insight into what determines our physical and mental characteristics, what we inherit from our parents and the risks of use developing certain diseases. The first cloned sheep was also created by geneticists in 1997 and genetically engineering is now widespread. The work on the human genome is ongoing

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and the greatest discoveries because of the unravelling of the human genome may be yet to come.

4) X-Rays

Thanks to the late nineteenth century studies conducted by German physicist Wilhelm Röntgen on the X-ray, we have tools to look inside the human body. These energy forms have helped us discover and properly diagnose injuries and ailments that could otherwise be missed by external inspection. The X-ray also paved the way for advances in imaging technologies as well as progress in clinical studies and medical science.

5) Insulin

In the early 1920s, Canadian medical scientist Sir Frederick Banting, along with medical student Charles Best, identified the hormone insulin. Their experiments eventually led to a successful treatment for people suffering from the disorder in which the pancreas cannot properly regulate the body's blood sugar levels, known as diabetes. Though not a cure, insulin has enabled many diabetics to live longer and less complicated lives without fear of early death.