



20th-Century Medicine Books

Surgery

Operations that people once regarded as impossible became routine in the 20th century. Many of these surgical advances resulted from improved drugs or medical technology. Better drugs to prevent rejection of transplanted organs made transplantation of hearts, kidneys, livers, lungs, and other organs removed from donors possible. Patients were kept alive with artificial kidneys and temporary artificial hearts while awaiting a transplant. The heart-lung machine made it possible to stop and restart the heart during coronary bypass surgery. Small fiber-optic instruments called endoscopes led to the new field of minimally invasive surgery. These new tools made it possible to remove a diseased gallbladder or appendix, for example, through small slits rather than large incisions, greatly reducing the amount of anesthesia required during the surgery and lessening recovery time. Transfusions of blood, plasma, and other saline solutions, which went into use in the 1930s, helped prevent deaths from shock in surgery patients. In the 1990s, physicians even began performing surgery to repair defects in unborn infants.