

12 Amazing Things We Learned About The Human Body In 2015

An illustrated guide.

🕒 12/22/2015 07:15 am ET | Updated Dec 23, 2015



Anna Almendrala
Healthy Living Senior Editor, Huffington Post



Kim Bellware
Reporter, The Huffington Post



The human body is a source of mystery. But every year, scientists get just a little better at understanding its secrets.

Of course, 2015 has been no different. In the past year, researchers have created better access to proven therapies, developed futuristic new technologies that may change the way we approach disease and even enacted more complete disease screening processes to keep us healthy.

Read on to learn more. Here's to more scientific discoveries in 2016!

Graphics by Alissa Scheller for the Huffington Post.

Special thanks to Dr. Camillo Ricordi of the Diabetes Research Institute, Dr. Hal C. Lawrence of the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, Dr. Inderbir Gill of the USC Institute of Urology, Dr. Sandeep Nathan of the University of Chicago Medicine, American Lung Association CEO Harold P. Wimmer and Dr. Pam Peeke of the American College of Sports Medicine.

What We Learned About The Body In 2015

11 K



This Virus Can Cure Blindness

People who have been blind since birth due to genetic conditions were able to sense light or even have near-normal levels of sight after being injected with a benign virus that carries "good" copies of a malformed gene into a subject's retina. "The promise of gene therapy is that a very simple procedure -- an injection that takes seconds -- has the potential to restore vision for a lifetime," said Joe Balintfy, a spokesman with the National Institutes of Health. [READ MORE](#)

A Revolutionary Heart Implant That Doesn't Require Major Surgery

In April, a man in Minneapolis with a diseased mitral valve (in the heart) received a catheter-based implant which can now be inserted without a large chest incision or the need to stop a beating heart -- two things that can be traumatic and dangerous for weaker patients. [READ MORE](#)

Women Gravitate Toward 'Foolproof' Contraception

More women than ever (11.6 percent in 2013, up from 8 percent in 2010) before are using long-acting reversible contraceptives, like IUDs and hormonal implants in the arm. Dr. Hal C. Lawrence, CEO of the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists says its no surprise, as the methods are "virtually foolproof." [READ MORE](#)

Your Guts Affect How You Feel

High levels of "prebiotic" gut bacteria may help curb depression and anxiety. When compared to the placebo group, subjects who took a prebiotic supplement for three weeks paid less attention to negative information and more attention to positive information, experiencing less anxiety when confronted with negative stimuli. [READ MORE](#)

Strong Legs May Mean Better Brains

People who want to avoid dementia should fit in some squats alongside their Sudoku and crossword puzzle rituals: Maintaining strong legs through weight training or daily life activities is linked to 18 percent better memory and cognitive brain skills, as well as greater brain volume and fewer "empty spaces" throughout the brain. [READ MORE](#)

Your Brain Can Be 'Spacey' -- Literally

Too much time away from the pull of earth's gravity may make it harder for you to do simple tasks. A study of NASA astronauts who spent six months aboard the International Space Station found they had more difficulty doing things that required spatial reasoning and motor skills, like navigating an obstacle course, after their time in a microgravity environment. [READ MORE](#)

A Simple Throat Swab Could Diagnose Schizophrenia

People with schizophrenia tend to have higher levels of certain throat and mouth bacteria than people who do not live with the mental illness, according to pair of studies that include research from scientists at the Johns Hopkins School of Medicine. The findings could provide doctors a new way to diagnose the schizophrenia and potentially make for a test that's as simple as swabbing a patient's mouth. [READ MORE](#)

You Can 3-D Print Your Way To A Better Windpipe

Scientists have found a way to 3-D print human cartilage to ensure a perfect size and shape when replacing or repairing a human trachea. Doctors can even computer model a patient's windpipe to make sure they print a repair piece that's the perfect size and shape, thus reducing the guesswork -- and the potential amount of time a patient remains anesthetized on the table. [READ MORE](#)

High-Risk Patients Can Now Get Lung CT Scans

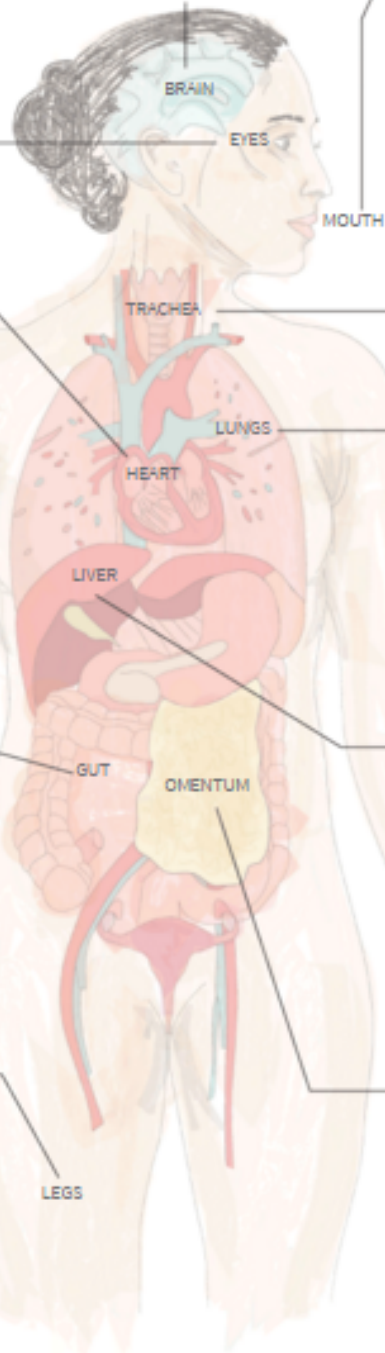
Lung cancer CT screening, a low-radiation x-ray, is the only screening tool that reduces lung cancer deaths. The high risk people who need it the most have more access than ever before, as the Centers of Medicare and Medicaid finalized plans to cover it in February. [READ MORE](#)

More Access To Drugs That Cure

We've had blockbuster drugs that can cure Hepatitis C (the virus that causes liver damage) since 2013, but this is the first year that access to the lifesaving medication is widespread. Medicare spent \$9.2 billion on drugs for Hepatitis C (almost twice what they did last year), and federal officials sent a letter to Medicaid directors in every state warning them against denying the drugs to sick people. [READ MORE](#)

Insulin Shots Could Become A Thing Of The Past

A 48-year-old woman from San Antonio became the first ever type 1 diabetes patient to successfully wean herself off insulin injections, thanks to an infusion of insulin-producing islet cells. Doctors hope this will be the first step toward a cure for the disease. [READ MORE](#)



We Can Treat Prostate Cancer With No Recovery Time

The FDA just approved use of the robotic high intensity focused ultrasound -- a non-invasive technique that destroys prostate tumors without requiring doctors to remove the whole gland or use harmful radiation. Recovery time is so short that the first-ever patient went on a business trip less than a week later. [READ MORE](#)



Insulin Shots Could Become A Thing Of The Past

A 43-year-old woman from San Antonio became the first ever type 1 diabetes patient to successfully wean herself off insulin injections, thanks to an infusion of insulin-producing islet cells. Doctors hope this will be the first step toward a cure for the disease. [READ MORE.](#)