Selman Abraham Waksman Encyclopedia Article

Selman Abraham Waksman

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Selman Abraham Waksman

1888-1973

Ukrainian-born American biochemist who won the 1952 Nobel Prize for physiology or medicine for his discovery of the antibiotic streptomycin, the first specific agent effective in the treatment of tuberculosis. Waksman coined the term "antibiotic" in 1941. After the discovery of penicillin, Waksman initiated a systematic search for other antibiotic-producing microbes. He was able to extract various antibiotics from the microorganisms known as actinomycetes. Actinomycin proved to be very toxic to animals, but streptomycin was relatively nontoxic and was effective against gram-negative bacteria, including the tubercle bacillus (*Mycobacterium tuberculosis*).