

Edward Albert Sharpey-Schafer Biography

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Biography

Edward Sharpey-Schafer was the first to use, in 1894, an adrenal gland extract to raise blood pressure. He also proposed and named the pancreatic hormone insulin. In 1903, he developed the technique of artificial respiration in which the victim is administered to while lying face-up.

Edward Albert Schafer was born into a merchant family in Hornsey, Middlesex, England. He was a medical graduate of University College, London, and became a professor there in 1883. In 1899, he became a professor of physiology at Edinburgh University. One of Schafer's professors, William Sharpey, became his mentor, and Schafer named one of his sons for him. After both of Schafer's sons died in World War I, he prefixed his own name with Sharpey's and is usually known as Sharpey-Schafer.

In 1894, Sharpey-Schafer and a colleague discovered that an extract from the adrenal gland injected into an animal caused the blood vessels to narrow, raising the animal's blood pressure. This experiment led two scientists in the United States, biochemist John Jacob Abel in 1897 and biochemist Jokichi Takamine in 1901, to isolate epinephrine (adrenaline). It also enabled the British physiologists William Bayliss and Ernest Starling to develop the concept of hormones--substances secreted by glands to control cell activity--in 1905.

Sharpey-Schafer was the first to propose (in 1916) the existence of a pancreas hormone to regulate body glucose, which he named *insuline*, from the Latin word for island, since he believed it originated in the islet (island) of Langerhans cells. In 1921, the hormone was isolated by the Canadian researchers Frederick Banting and Charles Best and given Sharpey-Schafer's name, shortened to insulin.

Besides his medical accomplishments, Sharpey-Schafer was an outspoken supporter of medical education for women.