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Motor Sensory Reflex and Higher Function Examination

Practical 11 / Supervised clinical examination

Aim

Demonstrate higher function screening, motor examination, sensation, reflexes and coordination.

Principle

Findings localise when several modalities fit the same distribution. Usage of consistent positioning and side comparisons improves reliability.

Materials and Requirements

- Consenting volunteer or standardised patient
- Reflex hammer, cotton and tuning fork
- Examination record sheet

Procedure

1. Check alertness, orientation, speech and the ability to follow relevant commands.
2. Introduce the examination and ask about pain, weakness, sensory change and mobility support. Verify that the volunteer hears and understands the tasks.
3. Compare muscle bulk, tone and power by movement and side. Assess gait and coordination only when safe.

Continue with step 4 on the next page.

Procedure Continued

Motor Sensory Reflex and Higher Function Examination

4. Inspect for asymmetry or wasting, assess tone with supported passive movement and compare selected movements against resistance. Grade power with the taught scale.
5. Test one upper and lower limb coordination task as appropriate. If gait is safe, observe walking and turning with assistance available and record the pattern or reason it was omitted.
6. Compare light touch and vibration or joint position using the taught stimuli and a consistent pattern.
7. Demonstrate the sensory stimulus on unaffected skin. Ask the volunteer to close their eyes and describe what they feel. Compare matching sites and map the boundary of a finding.
8. Elicit representative deep tendon reflexes with relaxed positioning. Document symmetry and integrate the findings.
9. Support the limb and compare biceps, knee and ankle responses using the taught reflex positions. Record side, grade and reinforcement if used, then present the motor and sensory pattern.

Precautions

- Support the person during gait testing and avoid falls.
- Use approved noninjurious stimuli and avoid unnecessary exposure.

Observations and Interpretation

Motor Sensory Reflex and Higher Function Examination

Observations and Record

Item	What to record	What it tells you
Higher functions	Orientation, attention and language	Screens cognitive functions
Motor and reflexes	Power by movement, tone and side	Supports pathway localisation
Sensation and coordination	Modalities, distribution and observed performance	Distinguishes focal and diffuse patterns

Worked Example

A fictional unilateral pattern of weakness and brisk reflexes may suggest an upper motor pathway problem. Compare tone, plantar response and distribution before localising.

Result and Interpretation

Record tested functions and side. Explain which findings fit an anatomical pathway rather than listing an unsupported diagnosis.

Viva Questions and Answers

What makes side comparisons useful?

They help identify asymmetry under similar technique.

What is proprioception?

Awareness of joint position and movement.

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