

Neurological Examination

5A-1 INTRODUCTION

This appendix provides guidance on evaluating diving accidents prior to treatment. Figure 5A-1a is a guide aimed at non-medical personnel for recording essential details and conducting a neurological examination. Copies of this form should be readily available. While its use is not mandatory, it provides a useful aid for gathering information.

5A-2 INITIAL ASSESSMENT OF DIVING INJURIES

When using the form in Figure 5A-1a, the initial assessment must gather the necessary information for proper evaluation of the accident.

When a diver reports with a medical complaint, a history of the case shall be compiled. This history should include facts ranging from the dive profile to progression of the medical problem. If available, review the diver's Health Record and completed Diving Chart or Diving Log to aid in the examination. A few key questions can help determine a preliminary diagnosis and any immediate treatment needed. If the preliminary diagnosis shows the need for immediate recompression, proceed with recompression. Complete the examination when the patient stabilizes at treatment depth. Typical questions should include the following:

1. What is the problem/symptom? If the only symptom is pain:
 - a. Describe the pain:
 - Sharp
 - Dull
 - Throbbing
 - b. Is the pain localized, or hard to pinpoint?
2. Has the patient made a dive recently?
3. What was the dive profile?
 - a. What was the depth of the dive?
 - b. What was the bottom time?
 - c. What dive rig was used?
 - d. What type of work was performed?
 - e. Did anything unusual occur during the dive?

4. How many dives has the patient made in the last 24 hours?
 - a. Chart profile(s) of any other dive(s).
5. Were the symptoms first noted before, during, or after the dive? If after the dive, how long after surfacing?
6. If during the dive, did the patient notice the symptom while descending, on the bottom, or during ascent?
7. Has the symptom either increased or decreased in intensity since first noticed?
8. Have any additional symptoms developed since the first one?
9. Has the patient ever had a similar symptom?
10. Has the patient ever suffered from decompression sickness or gas embolism in the past?
 - a. Describe this symptom in relation to the prior incident if applicable.
11. Does the patient have any concurrent medical conditions that might explain the symptoms?

To aid in the evaluation, review the diver's Health Record, including a baseline neurological examination, if available, and completed Diving Chart or Diving Log, if they are readily available.

5A-3 NEUROLOGICAL ASSESSMENT

There are various ways to perform a neurological examination. The quickest information pertinent to the diving injury is obtained by directing the initial examination toward the symptomatic areas of the body. These concentrate on the motor, sensory, and coordination functions. If this examination is normal, the most productive information is obtained by performing a complete examination of the following:

1. Mental status
2. Coordination
3. Motor
4. Cranial nerves
5. Extremity strength
6. Sensory
7. Deep tendon reflexes

The following procedures are adequate for preliminary examination. Figure 5A-1a can be used to record the results of the examination.

NEUROLOGICAL EXAMINATION CHECKLIST

(Sheet 1 of 2)

(See text of Appendix 5A for examination procedures and definitions of terms.)

Patient's Name: _____ Date/Time: _____

Describe pain/numbness: _____

HISTORY

Type of dive last performed: _____ Depth: _____ How long: _____

Number of dives in last 24 hours: _____

Was symptom noticed before, during or after the dive? _____

If during, was it while descending, on the bottom or ascending? _____

Has symptom increased or decreased since it was first noticed? _____

Have any other symptoms occurred since the first one was noticed? _____

Describe: _____

Has patient ever had a similar symptom before? _____ When: _____

Has patient ever had decompression sickness or an air embolism before? _____ When: _____

MENTAL STATUS/STATE OF CONSCIOUSNESS

COORDINATION

Walk: _____
Heel-to-Toe: _____
Romberg: _____
Finger-to-Nose: _____
Heel Shin Slide: _____
Rapid Movement: _____

CRANIAL NERVES

Sense of Smell (I): _____
Vision/Visual Fld (II): _____
Eye Movements, Pupils (III, IV, VI): _____
Facial Sensation, Chewing (V): _____
Facial Expression Muscles (VII): _____
Hearing (VIII): _____
Upper Mouth, Throat Sensation (IX): _____
Gag & Voice (X): _____
Shoulder Shrug (XI): _____
Tongue (XII): _____

STRENGTH (Grade 0 to 5)

Upper Body

Deltoids L _____ R _____
Latissimus L _____ R _____
Biceps L _____ R _____
Triceps L _____ R _____
Forearms L _____ R _____
Hands L _____ R _____

Lower Body

Hips

Flexion L _____ R _____
Extension L _____ R _____
Abduction L _____ R _____
Adduction L _____ R _____

Knees

Flexion L _____ R _____
Extension L _____ R _____

Figure 5A-1a. Neurological Examination Checklist (sheet 1 of 2).

NEUROLOGICAL EXAMINATION CHECKLIST

(Sheet 2 of 2)

REFLEXES

(Grade: Normal, Hypoactive, Hyperactive, Absent)

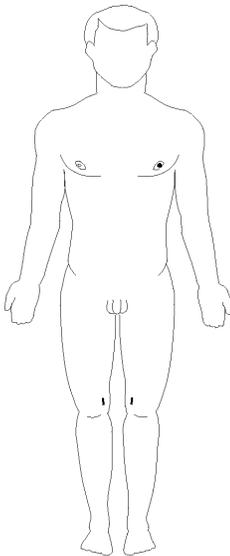
Biceps L _____ R _____
Triceps L _____ R _____
Knees L _____ R _____
Ankles L _____ R _____

Ankles
Dorsiflexion L _____ R _____
Plantarflexion L _____ R _____

Toes L _____ R _____

Sensory Examination for Skin Sensation
(Use diagram to record location of sensory abnormalities — numbness, tingling, etc.)

LOCATION



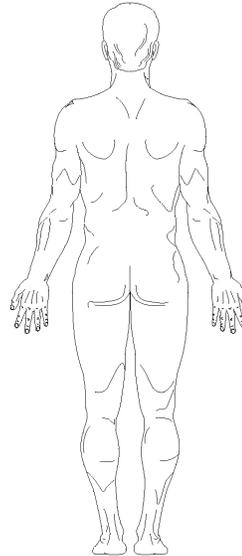
Indicate results
as follows:



Painful
Area



Decreased
Sensation



COMMENTS

Examination Performed by: _____

Figure 5A-1b. Neurological Examination Checklist (sheet 1 of 2).

5A-3.1 Mental Status. This is best determined when you first see the patient and is characterized by his alertness, orientation, and thought process. Obtain a good history, including the dive profile, present symptoms, and how these symptoms have changed since onset. The patient’s response to this questioning and that during the neurological examination will give you a great deal of information about his mental status. It is important to determine if the patient knows the time and place, and can recognize familiar people and understands what is happening. Is the patient’s mood appropriate?

Next the examiner may determine if the patient’s memory is intact by questioning the patient. The questions asked should be reasonable, and you must know the answer to the questions you ask. Questions such as the following may be helpful:

- What is your commanding officer’s name?
- What did you have for lunch?

Finally, if a problem does arise in the mental status evaluation, the examiner may choose to assess the patient’s cognitive function more fully. Cognitive function is an intellectual process by which one becomes aware of, perceives, or comprehends ideas and involves all aspects of perception, thinking, reasoning, and remembering. Some suggested methods of assessing this function are:

- The patient should be asked to remember something. An example would be “red ball, green tree, and couch.” Inform him that later in the examination you will ask him to repeat this information.
- The patient should be asked to spell a word, such as “world,” backwards.
- The patient should be asked to count backwards from 100 by sevens.
- The patient should be asked to recall the information he was asked to remember at the end of the examination.

5A-3.2 Coordination (Cerebellar/Inner Ear Function). A good indicator of muscle strength and general coordination is to observe how the patient walks. A normal gait indicates that many muscle groups and general brain functions are normal. More thorough examination involves testing that concentrates on the brain and inner ear. In conducting these tests, both sides of the body shall be tested and the results shall be compared. These tests include:

1. **Heel-to-Toe Test.** The tandem walk is the standard “drunk driver” test. While looking straight ahead, the patient must walk a straight line, placing the heel of one foot directly in front of the toes of the opposite foot. Signs to look for and consider deficits include:
 - a. Does the patient limp?
 - b. Does the patient stagger or fall to one side?

2. **Romberg Test.** With eyes closed, the patient stands with feet together and arms extended to the front, palms up. Note whether the patient can maintain his balance or if he immediately falls to one side. Some examiners recommend giving the patient a small shove from either side with the fingertips.
3. **Finger-to-Nose Test.** The patient stands with eyes closed and head back, arms extended to the side. Bending the arm at the elbow, the patient touches his nose with an extended forefinger, alternating arms. An extension of this test is to have the patient, with eyes open, alternately touch his nose with his fingertip and then touch the fingertip of the examiner. The examiner will change the position of his fingertip each time the patient touches his nose. In this version, speed is not important, but accuracy is.
4. **Heel-Shin Slide Test.** While standing, the patient touches the heel of one foot to the knee of the opposite leg, foot pointing forward. While maintaining this contact, he runs his heel down the shin to the ankle. Each leg should be tested.
5. **Rapid Alternating Movement Test.** The patient slaps one hand on the palm of the other, alternating palm up and then palm down. Any exercise requiring rapidly changing movement, however, will suffice. Again, both sides should be tested.

5A-3.3

Cranial Nerves. The cranial nerves are the 12 pairs of nerves emerging from the cranial cavity through various openings in the skull. Beginning with the most anterior (front) on the brain stem, they are appointed Roman numerals. An isolated cranial nerve lesion is an unusual finding in decompression sickness or gas embolism, but deficits occasionally occur and you should test for abnormalities. The cranial nerves must be quickly assessed as follows:

- I. **Olfactory.** The olfactory nerve, which provides our sense of smell, is usually not tested.
- II. **Optic.** The optic nerve is for vision. It functions in the recognition of light and shade and in the perception of objects. This test should be completed one eye at a time to determine whether the patient can read. Ask the patient if he has any blurring of vision, loss of vision, spots in the visual field, or peripheral vision loss (tunnel vision). More detailed testing can be done by standing in front of the patient and asking him to cover one eye and look straight at you. In a plane midway between yourself and the patient, slowly bring your fingertip in turn from above, below, to the right, and to the left of the direction of gaze until the patient can see it. Compare this with the earliest that you can see it with the equivalent eye. If a deficit is present, roughly map out the positions of the blind spots by passing the finger tip across the visual field.
- III. **Oculomotor, (IV.) Trochlear, (VI.) Abducens.** These three nerves control eye movements. All three nerves can be tested by having the patient's eyes follow the examiner's finger in all four directions (quadrants) and then in towards the tip of the nose (giving a "crossed-eyed" look). The oculomotor nerve can be

further tested by shining a light into one eye at a time. In a normal response, the pupils of both eyes will constrict.

- V. Trigeminal.** The Trigeminal Nerve governs sensation of the forehead and face and the clenching of the jaw. It also supplies the muscle of the ear (tensor tympani) necessary for normal hearing. Sensation is tested by lightly stroking the forehead, face, and jaw on each side with a finger or wisp of cotton wool.
- VII. Facial.** The Facial Nerve controls the face muscles. It stimulates the scalp, forehead, eyelids, muscles of facial expression, cheeks, and jaw. It is tested by having the patient smile, show his teeth, whistle, wrinkle his forehead, and close his eyes tightly. The two sides should perform symmetrically. Symmetry of the nasolabial folds (lines from nose to outside corners of the mouth) should be observed.
- VIII. Acoustic.** The Acoustic Nerve controls hearing and balance. Test this nerve by whispering to the patient, rubbing your fingers together next to the patient's ears, or putting a tuning fork near the patient's ears. Compare this against the other ear.
- IX. Glossopharyngeal.** The Glossopharyngeal Nerves transmit sensation from the upper mouth and throat area. It supplies the sensory component of the gag reflex and constriction of the pharyngeal wall when saying "aah." Test this nerve by touching the back of the patient's throat with a tongue depressor. This should cause a gagging response. This nerve is normally not tested.
- X. Vagus.** The Vagus Nerve has many functions, including control of the roof of the mouth and vocal cords. The examiner can test this nerve by having the patient say "aah" while watching for the palate to rise. Note the tone of the voice; hoarseness may also indicate vagus nerve involvement.
- XI. Spinal Accessory.** The Spinal Accessory Nerve controls the turning of the head from side to side and shoulder shrug against resistance. Test this nerve by having the patient turn his head from side to side. Resistance is provided by placing one hand against the side of the patient's head. The examiner should note that an injury to the nerve on one side will cause an inability to turn the head to the opposite side or weakness/absence of the shoulder shrug on the affected side.
- XII. Hypoglossal.** The Hypoglossal Nerve governs the muscle activity of the tongue. An injury to one of the hypoglossal nerves causes the tongue to twist to that side when stuck out of the mouth.

5A-3.4 Motor. A diver with decompression sickness may experience disturbances in the muscle system. The range of symptoms can be from a mild twitching of a muscle to weakness and paralysis. No matter how slight the abnormality, symptoms involving the motor system shall be treated.

5A-3.4.1 **Extremity Strength.** It is common for a diver with decompression illness to experience muscle weakness. Extremity strength testing is divided into two parts: upper body and lower body. All muscle groups should be tested and compared with the corresponding group on the other side, as well as with the examiner. Table 5A-1 describes the extremity strength tests in more detail. Muscle strength is graded (0-5) as follows:

- (0) **Paralysis.** No motion possible.
- (1) **Profound Weakness.** Flicker or trace of muscle contraction.
- (2) **Severe Weakness.** Able to contract muscle but cannot move joint against gravity.
- (3) **Moderate Weakness.** Able to overcome the force of gravity but not the resistance of the examiner.
- (4) **Mild Weakness.** Able to resist slight force of examiner.
- (5) **Normal.** Equal strength bilaterally (both sides) and able to resist examiner.

5A-3.4.1.1 **Upper Extremities.** These muscles are tested with resistance provided by the examiner. The patient should overcome force applied by the examiner that is tailored to the patient's strength. Table 5A-1 describes the extremity strength tests. The six muscle groups tested in the upper extremity are:

- 1. Deltoids.
- 2. Latissimus.
- 3. Biceps.
- 4. Triceps.
- 5. Forearm muscles.
- 6. Hand muscles.

5A-3.4.1.2 **Lower Extremities.** The lower extremity strength is assessed by watching the patient walk on his heels for a short distance and then on his toes. The patient should then walk while squatting ("duck walk"). These tests adequately assess lower extremity strength, as well as balance and coordination. If a more detailed examination of the lower extremity strength is desired, testing should be accomplished at each joint as in the upper arm.

5A-3.4.2 **Muscle Size.** Muscles are visually inspected and felt, while at rest, for size and consistency. Look for symmetry of posture and of muscle contours and outlines. Examine for fine muscle twitching.

5A-3.4.3 **Muscle Tone.** Feel the muscles at rest and the resistance to passive movement. Look and feel for abnormalities in tone such as spasticity, rigidity, or no tone.

5A-3.4.4 **Involuntary Movements.** Inspection may reveal slow, irregular, and jerky movements, rapid contractions, tics, or tremors.

5A-3.5 **Sensory Function.** Common presentations of decompression sickness in a diver that may indicate spinal cord dysfunction are:

Table 5A-1. Extremity Strength Tests.

Test	Procedure
Deltoid Muscles	The patient raises his arm to the side at the shoulder joint. The examiner places a hand on the patient's wrist and exerts a downward force that the patient resists.
Latissimus Group	The patient raises his arm to the side. The examiner places a hand on the underside of the patient's wrist and resists the patient's attempt to lower his arm.
Biceps	The patient bends his arm at the elbow, toward his chest. The examiner then grasps the patient's wrist and exerts a force to straighten the patient's arm.
Triceps	The patient bends his arm at the elbow, toward his chest. The examiner then places his hand on the patient's forearm and the patient tries to straighten his arm.
Forearm Muscles	The patient makes a fist. The examiner grips the patient's fist and resists while the patient tries to bend his wrist upward and downward.
Hand Muscles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The patient strongly grips the examiner's extended fingers. • The patient extends his hand with the fingers widespread. The examiner grips two of the extended fingers with two of his own fingers and tries to squeeze the patient's two fingers together, noting the patient's strength of resistance.
Lower Extremity Strength	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The patient walks on his heels for a short distance. The patient then turns around and walks back on his toes. • The patient walks while squatting (duck walk). <p>These tests adequately assesses lower extremity strength as well as balance and coordination. If a more detailed examination of lower extremity strength is desired, testing should be accomplished at each joint as in the upper arm.</p>
<i>In the following tests, the patient sits on a solid surface such as a desk, with feet off the floor.</i>	
Hip Flexion	The examiner places his hand on the patient's thigh to resist as the patient tries to raise his thigh.
Hip Extension	The examiner places his hand on the underside of the patient's thigh to resist as the patient tries to lower his thigh.
Hip Abduction	The patients sits as above, with knees together. The examiner places a hand on the outside of each of the patient's knees to provide resistance. The patient tries to open his knees.
Hip Adduction	The patient sits as above, with knees apart. The examiner places a hand on the inside of each of the patient's knees to provide resistance. The patient tries to bring his knees together.
Knee Extension	The examiner places a hand on the patient's shin to resist as the patient tries to straighten his leg.
Knee Flexion	The examiner places a hand on the back of the patient's lower leg to resist as the patient tries to pull his lower leg to the rear by flexing his knee.
Ankle Dorsiflexion (ability to flex the foot toward the rear)	The examiner places a hand on top of the patient's foot to resist as the patient tries to raise his foot by flexing it at the ankle.
Ankle Plantarflexion (ability to flex the foot downward)	The examiner places a hand on the bottom of the patient's foot to resist as the patient tries to lower his foot by flexing it at the ankle.
Toes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The patient stands on tiptoes for 15 seconds • The patient flexes his toes with resistance provided by the examiner.

- Pain
- Numbness
- Tingling (“pins-and-needles” feeling; also called paresthesia)

- 5A-3.5.1 **Sensory Examination.** An examination of the patient’s sensory faculties should be performed. Figure 5A-2a shows the dermatomal (sensory) areas of skin sensations that correlate with each spinal cord segment. Note that the dermatomal areas of the trunk run in a circular pattern around the trunk. The dermatomal areas in the arms and legs run in a more lengthwise pattern. In a complete examination, each spinal segment should be checked for loss of sensation.
- 5A-3.5.2 **Sensations.** Sensations easily recognized by most normal people are sharp/dull discrimination (to perceive as separate) and light touch. It is possible to test pressure, temperature, and vibration in special cases. The likelihood of DCS affecting only one sense, however, is very small.
- 5A-3.5.3 **Instruments.** An ideal instrument for testing changes in sensation is a sharp object, such as the Wartenberg pinwheel or a common safety pin. Either of these objects must be applied at intervals. Avoid scratching or penetrating the skin. It is not the intent of this test to cause pain.
- 5A-3.5.4 **Testing the Trunk.** Move the pinwheel or other sharp object from the top of the shoulder slowly down the front of the torso to the groin area. Another method is to run it down the rear of the torso to just below the buttocks. The patient should be asked if he feels a sharp point and if he felt it all the time. Test each dermatome by going down the trunk on each side of the body. Test the neck area in similar fashion.
- 5A-3.5.5 **Testing Limbs.** In testing the limbs, a circular pattern of testing is best. Test each limb in at least three locations, and note any difference in sensation on each side of the body. On the arms, circle the arm at the deltoid, just below the elbow, and at the wrist. In testing the legs, circle the upper thigh, just below the knee, and the ankle.
- 5A-3.5.6 **Testing the Hands.** The hand is tested by running the sharp object across the back and palm of the hand and then across the fingertips.
- 5A-3.5.7 **Marking Abnormalities.** If an area of abnormality is found, mark the area as a reference point in assessment. Some examiners use a marking pen to trace the area of decreased or increased sensation on the patient’s body. During treatment, these areas are rechecked to determine whether the area is improving. An example of improvement is an area of numbness getting smaller.
- 5A-3.6 **Deep Tendon Reflexes.** The purpose of the deep tendon reflexes is to determine if the patient’s response is normal, nonexistent, hypoactive (deficient), or hyperactive (excessive). The patient’s response should be compared to responses the examiner has observed before. Notation should be made of whether the responses are equal bilaterally (both sides) and if the upper and lower reflexes are similar. If any difference in the reflexes is noticed, the patient should be asked if there is a

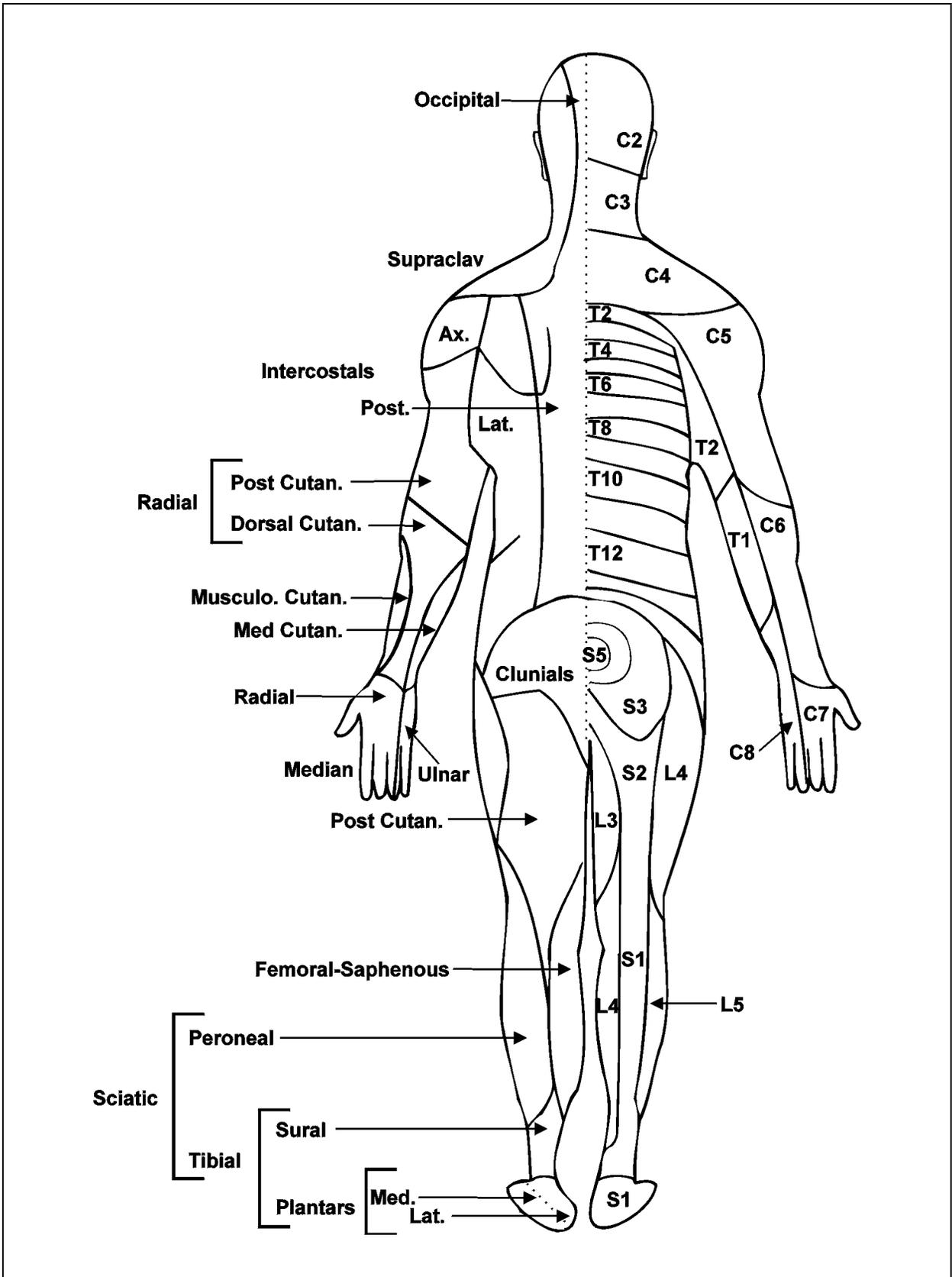


Figure 5A-2a. Dermatomal Areas Correlated to Spinal Cord Segment (sheet 1 of 2).

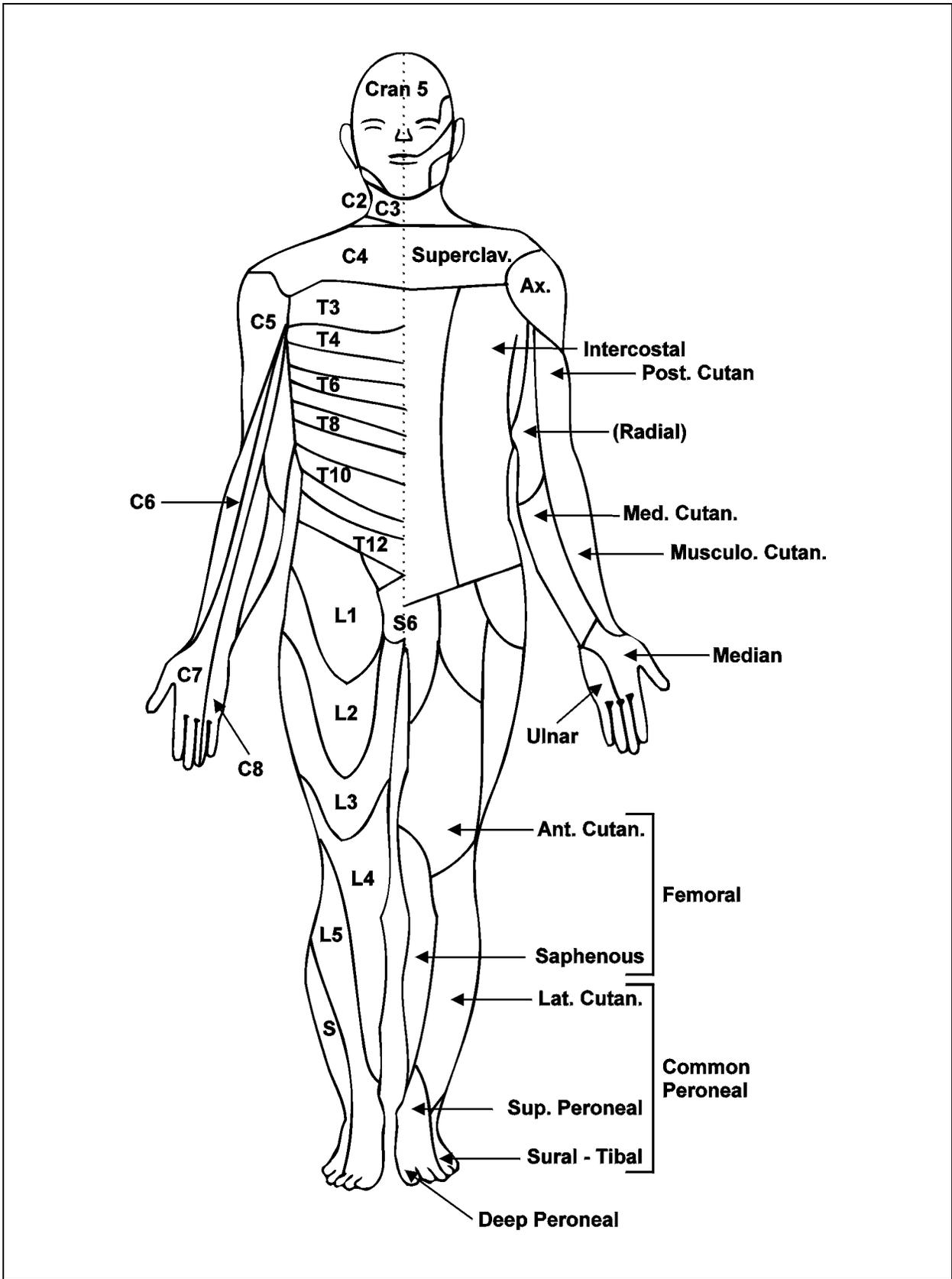


Figure 5A-2b. Dermatomal Areas Correlated to Spinal Cord Segment (sheet 2 of 2).

prior medical condition or injury that would cause the difference. Isolated differences should not be treated, because it is extremely difficult to get symmetrical responses bilaterally. To get the best response, strike each tendon with an equal, light force, and with sharp, quick taps. Usually, if a deep tendon reflex is abnormal due to decompression sickness, there will be other abnormal signs present. Test the biceps, triceps, knee, and ankle reflexes by striking the tendon as described in Table 5A-2.

Table 5A-2. Reflexes.

Test	Procedure
Biceps	The examiner holds the patient's elbow with the patient's hand resting on the examiner's forearm. The patient's elbow should be slightly bent and his arm relaxed. The examiner places his thumb on the patient's biceps tendon, located in the bend of the patient's elbow. The examiner taps his thumb with the percussion hammer, feeling for the patient's muscle to contract.
Triceps	The examiner supports the patient's arm at the biceps. The patient's arm hangs with the elbow bent. The examiner taps the back of the patient's arm just above the elbow with the percussion hammer, feeling for the muscle to contract.
Knee	The patient sits on a table or bench with his feet off the deck. The examiner taps the patient's knee just below the kneecap, on the tendon. The examiner looks for the contraction of the quadriceps (thigh muscle) and movement of the lower leg.
Ankle	The patient sits as above. The examiner places slight pressure on the patient's toes to stretch the Achilles' tendon, feeling for the toes to contract as the Achilles' tendon shortens (contracts).

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