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Non-invasive assessment of the severity of the autonomic lesion in spinal cord injury patients
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Keywords: Spinal cord injury; Autonomic nervous system; Sympathetic assessment; Classification

Objective.– To study the relation between severity of the somatic lesion and severity of the autonomic lesion.

Patients and method.– Thirty nine spinal cord injury (SCI) patients (21 tetraplegics and 18 paraplegics) presenting with a traumatic lesion above T10 were assessed (33 men and 6 women, mean age of 38 years and mean duration of evolution of 4,1 years). Twenty-nine had a motor and sensory complete lesion (American Incapacity Scale A), 7 a complete motor but incomplete sensory lesion (AIS B), 3 a motor incomplete lesion (AIS D).

They all showed normal autonomic responses (presence of palmar and plantar SSR and BP overshoot). Twenty-eight SCI patients with complete AIS A lesions, showed a good relation between presence of palmar SSR and absence of BP overshoot, indicating a sympathetic level of lesion below T1; 12 out of 14 patients showed a good relation between presence of palmar SSR and presence of BP overshoot, indicating a sympathetic level of lesion below T4.

In 28 patients with complete AIS A lesions, there was a good relation between reflex dermographism and autonomic testing, allowing assessment of the sympathetic level of lesion between T3 and T10. In patients with incomplete (AIS B-D) lesions, the relation was poor.

Discussion.– Autonomic testing (SSR and Valsalva) allow assessment of the integrity of the upper thoracic sympathetic cord (T1–T4). Reflex Dermographism comes in addition to further delimit the sympathetic level of lesion.

References
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Investigations of the Autonomic Nervous System: practical aspects
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In cases where symptoms are suggestive of autonomic disturbance (unexplained overactive bladder, voiding phase dysfunction...), specific testing for dysautonomia should be performed. Most explore the cardiovascular system: orthostatic hypotension, cold pressor test, hand grip test, stand test, 30/15 ratio, Valsalva ratio, deep breath test. The Schirmer test assesses dry eyes; the Saxon test and sugar cube test assess dry mouth. These tests are not invasive and are easy to perform without specific equipment.
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Sympathetic system and syringomyelia
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Keywords: Syringomyelia; Sympathetic system; Horner syndrome; Dyshidrosis; Neurogenic arthropathy

The spinal sympathetic system, from C8 to L2, is one of the first anatomical structures involved in syringomyelic cavity development. Its impact is variable but sometimes in the foreground of symptoms and signs.

The objective of this study is a review of physiopathology of numerous vegetative disorders which can be seen in syringomyelia. Moreover the review of the literature, we studied 54 cases of symptomatic post-traumatic syringomyelias followed in our departments.

This vegetative disturbance concerns pre-ganglionnic area. We may first encounter cutaneous disorders such as dyshidrosis, with frequent sweating. Horner syndrome may also be seen as the only sign of the disease. Other visceral disturbances are quite difficult to distinguish from spinal cord automatism. Neurogenic arthropathies are also linked to vegetative troubles.
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