

Several tests for cerebellar function can be performed as games (Box 4-14). When a Romberg test is done, stay beside the child if there is a possibility that he or she might fall. School-age children should be able to perform these tests, although in the finger-to-nose test, preschoolers normally can only bring the finger within 5 to 7.5 cm (2 to 3 inches) of the nose. Difficulty in performing these exercises indicates a poor sense of position (especially with the eyes closed) and incoordination (especially with the eyes open).

Box 4-14

Tests for Cerebellar Function

Finger-to-nose test: With the child's arm extended, ask the child to touch the nose with the index finger with the eyes open and then closed.

Heel-to-shin test: Have the child stand and run the heel of one foot down the shin or anterior aspect of the tibia of the other leg, both with the eyes opened and then closed.

Romberg test: Have the child stand with the eyes closed and heels together; falling or leaning to one side is abnormal and is called the Romberg sign.

Reflexes

Testing reflexes is an important part of the neurologic examination. Persistence of primitive reflexes (see Chapter 7), loss of reflexes, or hyperactivity of deep tendon reflexes is usually a result of a cerebral insult.

Elicit reflexes by using the rubber head of the reflex hammer, flat of the finger, or side of the hand. If the child is easily frightened by equipment, use your hand or finger. Although testing reflexes is a simple procedure, the child may inhibit the reflex by unconsciously tensing the muscle. To avoid tensing, distract younger children with toys or talk to them. Older children can concentrate on the exercise of grasping their two hands in front of them and trying to pull them apart. This diverts their attention from the testing and causes involuntary relaxation of the muscles.