

**Reflex Arc Lab****Purpose**

To study the simplest functional unit of the nervous system: the reflex arc.  
To understand the difference between a reflex and a reaction.

**Background**

Neurons communicate in many ways, but much of what the body must do every day is programmed as reflexes. Reflexes are rapid, predictable, involuntary motor responses to stimuli and they occur over neural pathways called **reflex arcs**.

Reflexes can be classed as either autonomic or somatic reflexes. **Autonomic reflexes** are not subject to conscious control. These reflexes activate smooth muscles, cardiac muscle, and the glands of the body and they regulate body functions such as digestion and blood pressure.

**Somatic reflexes** include all reflexes that stimulate skeletal muscles. An example of such a reflex is the rapid withdrawal of your foot from a piece of glass you have just stepped on.

Most reflexes have a minimum of five functional elements

1. The **receptor** reacts to a stimulus.
2. The **sensory neuron** conducts the afferent impulses to the CNS.
3. The **integration center** consists of one or more synapses in the CNS (not present in a monosynaptic reflex)
4. The **motor neuron** conducts the efferent impulses from the integration center to an effector
5. The effector, muscle fibers or glands, respond to the efferent impulses by contracting or secreting a product

**Procedure: Somatic Reflexes****Stretch Reflexes – Knee-jerk reflex; Achilles reflex**

1. Have the subject sit on the edge of a table with one leg dangling freely.
2. Tap the patellar ligament sharply with the reflex hammer to elicit response
3. The knee-jerk reflex assesses the L2-L4 level of the spinal cord.
4. Test both knees and record your observations.

Which muscles contracted? \_\_\_\_\_

5. Sketch a diagram of the reflex arc and label the receptor, sensory neuron, dorsal root, ventral root, motor neuron, and effector.
  
6. Now test the effect of muscular activity occurring simultaneously in other areas of the body. Tap the patellar ligament while the subject performs the **Jendrassik's maneuver** (the subject clasps his/her hands in front of him/her and, with fingers locked, tries vigorously to pull his/her hands apart). Is the response greater or less than the first time? \_\_\_\_\_  
If you observed that mental distraction or the Jendrassik's maneuver influenced the patellar reflex, explain the reason in the space below in complete sentences.

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# Reflex Arc And Reflexes Lab 27 Answers

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