

Letter to the Editor

the Babinski sign

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I was delighted to read Professor Van Gijn's exquisite prose summarizing French articles often not well known in English-speaking literature. As a lieutenant-colonel in the Swiss Army, and responsible for medical aspects of drafting in all French-speaking Switzerland for several years, I have had the opportunity of conducting a prospective, 'epidemiological' study of the plantar reflex in 3850 males aged 18–19 years. Each year, around 5000 young adults are examined in the French-speaking part of the country, for recruitment into our milician-based army. Because, fortunately, I do not have to be present every day, I have had the opportunity to test the plantar reflex each year in approximately 150–200 young, healthy men since 1993, when my involvement in the business started. I used Babinski's instructions, although probably with less elegance that displayed by Jan Van Gijn's hand on the February issue of Practical Neurology. In none of the 3850 subjects did I find a pathological (Babinski) sign or even a 'suspect' plantar reflex. Indeed, I examined so many people, because I 'wanted' to find at least one case of Babinski sign in a normal male. I did not succeed! Because it can still be found in some books and teachers' mouths that up to 2–3% of 'normals' may have a pathological plantar response, I suggest that this claim should join the four 'myths' already listed by Professor Van Gijn.