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Can proprioception be trained?

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In this issue Ashton-Miller et al. raise a number of issues in connection with proprioception. I find their article very stimulating. Proprioception and proprioceptive training have become fashion terms. It is therefore interesting that, at least in a strict sense, there is no proof that training increases proprioception of the ankles. While it may increase coordination and balance, as the authors point out, this is not the same thing as proprioception. The issue becomes even more complicated when we read studies about the effect of so-called “proprioceptive” training, or what should be called “balance training” or “coordination training.” Some groups use force plates with stabilometry functions to test their patients before and after training. However, one research group in northern Europe records only the sway in a single plane and disregards the sway in the other plane.

Since I had been unable to understand why, I put the question to them directly. They answered that this procedure is entirely adequate and is in fact used by many researchers studying vestibular balance problems. They added that unless they measured the sway in only a single plane, none of the differences of their studies would reach statistical significance. This worries me very much, because in real life and especially in sports the body requires proper balance, not merely in a single plane but in all directions.

I consider proprioception such an interesting field that I agree with Jerosch in Neuss, Germany, that we ought to form a “European Proprioception Study Group” within the framework of ESSKA 2000 and try to come to a consensus about definitions and about how research in this very interesting field should be conducted.

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