

The best known (and most important) of the so-called “pathological reflexes” is the Babinski response (upgoing toe; extensor response). The full expression of this reflex includes extension of the great toe and fanning of the other toes. This is actually a superficial reflex that is elicited in the same manner as the plantar response (i.e., scratching along the lateral aspect of the sole of the foot and then across the ball of the foot toward the great toe). This is a primitive withdrawal type response that is normal for the first few months of life and is suppressed by supraspinal activity sometime before 6 months of age. Damage to the descending tracts from the brain (either above the foramen magnum or in the spinal cord) promotes a return of this primitive protective reflex, while at the same time abolishing the normal plantar response. The appearance of this reflex suggests the presence of an upper motor neuron lesion.

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