

## THE PHYSIOLOGY OF BALANCE

The vestibular system is the sensory apparatus of the inner ear that helps the body maintain its postural equilibrium. The information furnished by the vestibular system is also essential for coordinating the position of the head and the movement of the eyes.

There are two sets of end organs in the inner ear, or labyrinth: the semicircular canals, which respond to rotational movements (angular acceleration); and the utricle and saccule within the vestibule, which respond to changes in the position of the head with respect to gravity (linear acceleration).

The information these organs deliver is proprioceptive in character, dealing with events within the body itself, rather than exteroceptive, dealing with events outside the body, as in the case of the responses of the cochlea to sound.

Functionally, these organs are closely related to the cerebellum and to the reflex centers of the spinal cord and brain stem that govern the movements of the eyes, neck, and limbs.