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MEDICINE AND SURGERY
300 LEVEL
HISTOLOGY ASSIGNMENT

With the aid of a diagram write an essay on the histology of the Organ of Corti.



The Organ of Corti is an organ in the inner ear. It includes three rows of outer hair cells and one row of inner hair cells. Vibrations caused by sound waves bend the stereocilia on these hair cells via an electromechanical force. The hair cells convert mechanical energy into electrical energy that is transmitted to the central nervous system via the auditory nerve to facilitate audition.
The organ of Corti is composed of both supporting cells and mechanosensory hair cells. The arrangement of mechanosensory cells are into inner and outer hair cells along rows. There is a single row of inner hair cells and three rows of outer hair cells which are separated by the supporting cells. The supporting cells are also named Dieters or phalangeal cells.
The hair cells within the organ of Corti have sterocilia that attach to the tectorial membrane. Shifts between the tectorial and basilar membranes move these sterocilia and activate or deactivate receptors on the hair cell surface. When cation channels open on the hair cells, potassium ions flow into the hair cells, the cells depolarize, and the depolarization causes voltage-gated calcium channels to open. The calcium influx results in glutamate release from the hair cells onto the auditory nerve. The auditory nerve then sends information about the sound wave to the brain.
Inner hair cells function primarily as the sensory organs for audition. They provide input to 95% of the auditory nerve fibers that project to the brain. The stiffness and size of the hair cell arrangement throughout the cochlea enable hair cells to respond to a variety of frequencies from low to high. Cells at the apex to respond to lower frequencies while hair cells at the base of the cochlea (near the oval window) respond to higher frequencies, which creates a tonotopic gradient throughout the cochlea.
While inner hair cells are the output center of the cochlea, the outer hair cells are the input center. They receive descending inputs from the brain to assist with the modulation of inner hair cell function (i.e., modulating tuning and intensity information). Unlike other regions of the brain, the modulation of inner hair cells by outer hair cells is not electrical but mechanical. Activation of outer hair cells changes the stiffness of their cell bodies; this manipulates the resonance of perilymph fluid movement within the scala media and allows for fine-tuning of inner hair cell activation.
Inner and outer hair cells are distinctly different in structure. Both types of hair cells have stereocilia on the apical surface; however, the arrangement of sterocilia and their connection to the tectorial membrane are distinctly different. For both types of hair cells, the mechanical bending of the sterocilia opens potassium channels at the tips of the sterocilia that allow hyperpolarization of the cells. The tallest of the stereocilia of outer hair cells are embedded into the tectorial membrane. These stereocilia get displaced as the basilar membrane moves with the tectorial membrane. The stereocilia of inner hair cells are free-floating. Movement of the viscous perilymph fluid provides the mechanical force to open these channels.
Inner hair cell activation is much more complicated than outer hair cell activation. The movement of fluid within the scala media relies on the resonance (vibration) of both the tectorial membrane and organ of Corti. Cells within the organ of Corti are much more flexible than cells within the basilar membrane. Alterations in the stiffness of these cells change the resonance of the organ of Corti and subsequently the movement of fluid within the scala media.
The outer hair cells alter the stiffness of the organ of Corti through a motor protein, prestin, located on the lateral membrane of these cells. These proteins vary in shape in response to voltage changes. Depolarization of the outer hair cells causes prestin to shorten, shifting the basilar membrane and increasing the membrane deflection, thereby intensifying the effect on the inner hair cells