
This is the awaited second edition of the now classic text by Dubowitz and Brooke first published in 1973. It encapsulates the great clinical and histopathological experience of the principal author and emphasises the need for expertise in both areas to solve most muscle problems.

The first chapter deals with the procedure of muscle biopsy in some detail and sets out the author's firm preference for needle biopsies, a view that will not be shared by all pathologists who have to report sections prepared from such samples often without adequate clinical details. Needle sampling seems to work best in a laboratory where the clinician who sees the patients is also directly responsible for both taking the biopsy and for its interpretation. This chapter is followed by sections on the various histochemical techniques, a review of normal and pathological findings and a helpful self-teaching section on "How to Read a Biopsy" which highlights the point that the most useful place for this book is next to the microscope. Chapters on Ultrastructural Changes (Dr Caroline Sewry) and Immunocytochemistry (Dr Robin Fitzsimmons) are valuable new additions.

The format of the second part of the book, on the pathology of individual diseases, is essentially unchanged from the first edition although the clinical illustrations (and regrettably the bar graphs showing the frequency of specific pathological features have been omitted. Each major disease grouping is extensively illustrated by individual case histories accompanied by the relevant histopathological findings. The range of abnormalities is effectively demonstrated in many disorders by showing several cases; for example 13 of spinal muscular atrophy (neonate to adult) and nearly 20 of Duchenne dystrophy. Professor Dubowitz's unique experience of childhood neuromuscular disease is amply illustrated and described in the sections on Diseases of the Lower Motor Neuron, Muscular Dystrophy and Congenital Myopathies. The chapter on metabolic and endocrine myopathy is strong on the genetically determined diseases but acquired (endocrine) myopathies are rather sparsely represented and not illustrated at all, although biopsies from patients with such disorders are common in the general hospital setting. The value of the succinate dehydrogenase reaction (rather than the NADH-TR) in looking for evidence of mitochondrial accumulations might perhaps have been emphasised. There follow chapters on inflammatory muscle disease (10 cases illustrated), a miscellaneous group (including myasthenia, disorders associated with contracture and rigid spine) and Problems in Diagnosis and Interpretation. The book is nicely presented and, on the whole, the many photomicrographs (all black and white) are of good quality although a number lack really clear definition and seem slightly hazy. The references are comprehensive and the index satisfactory. The text of the book is both informative and, given the potentially dry nature of the topic, interestingly written. Both clinicians and pathologists dealing with neuromuscular diseases will find much practical guidance here.

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