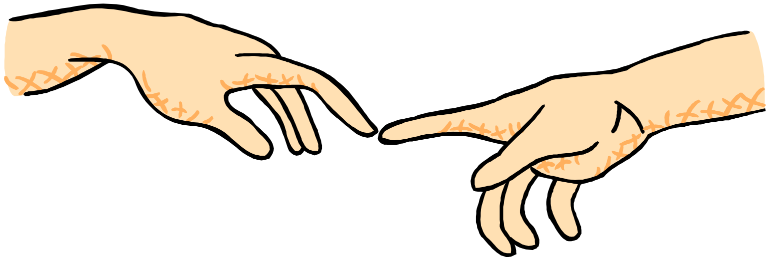
Touching



Ehud Ahissar

Touching

- Body-world interface
- Mechanisms of sensory processing (across senses)
- Motor-sensory coupling
- Passive vs active touch
- Neuronal coding
- Morphological coding

Body-world interface

Underneath the skin

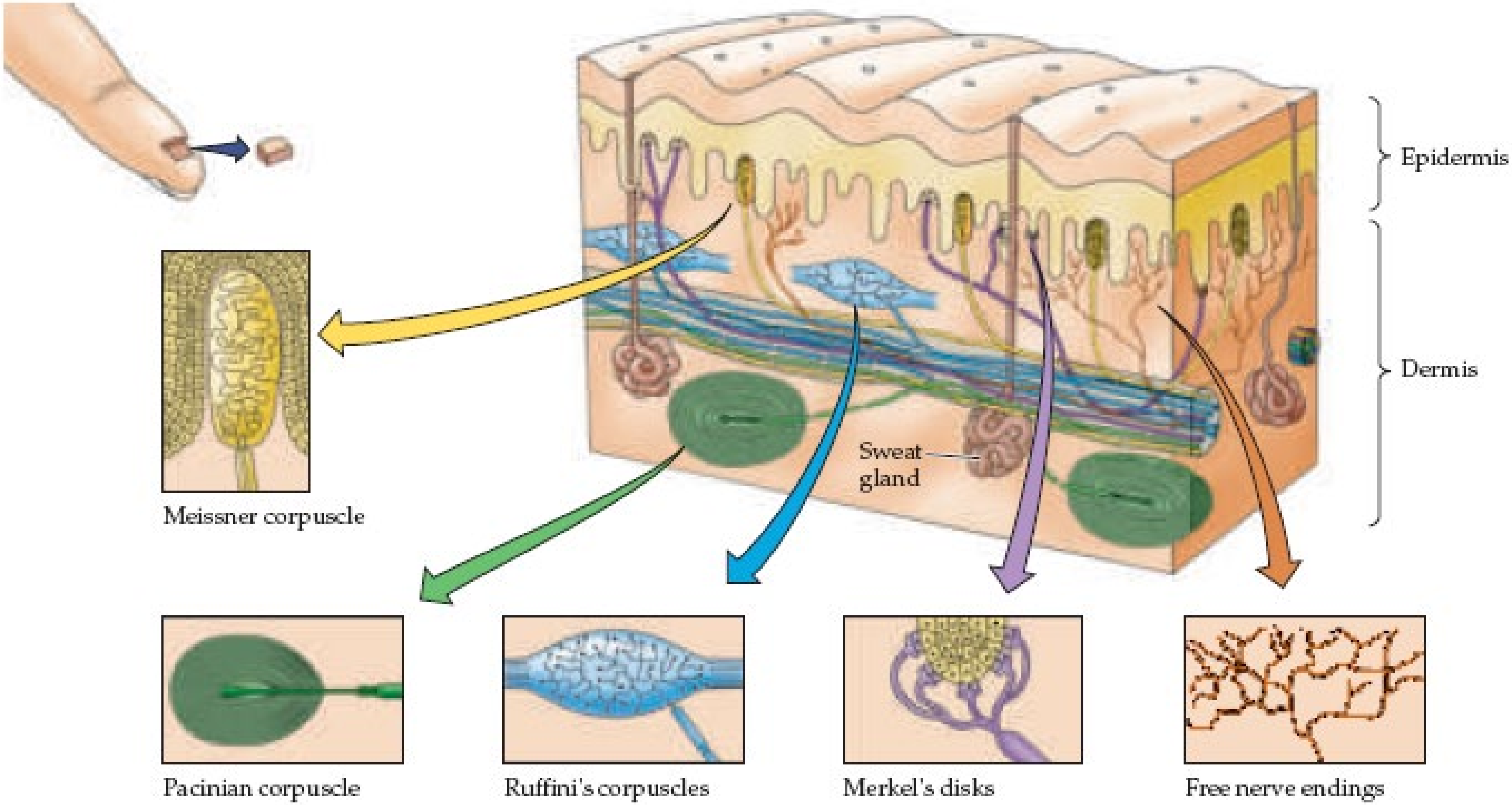
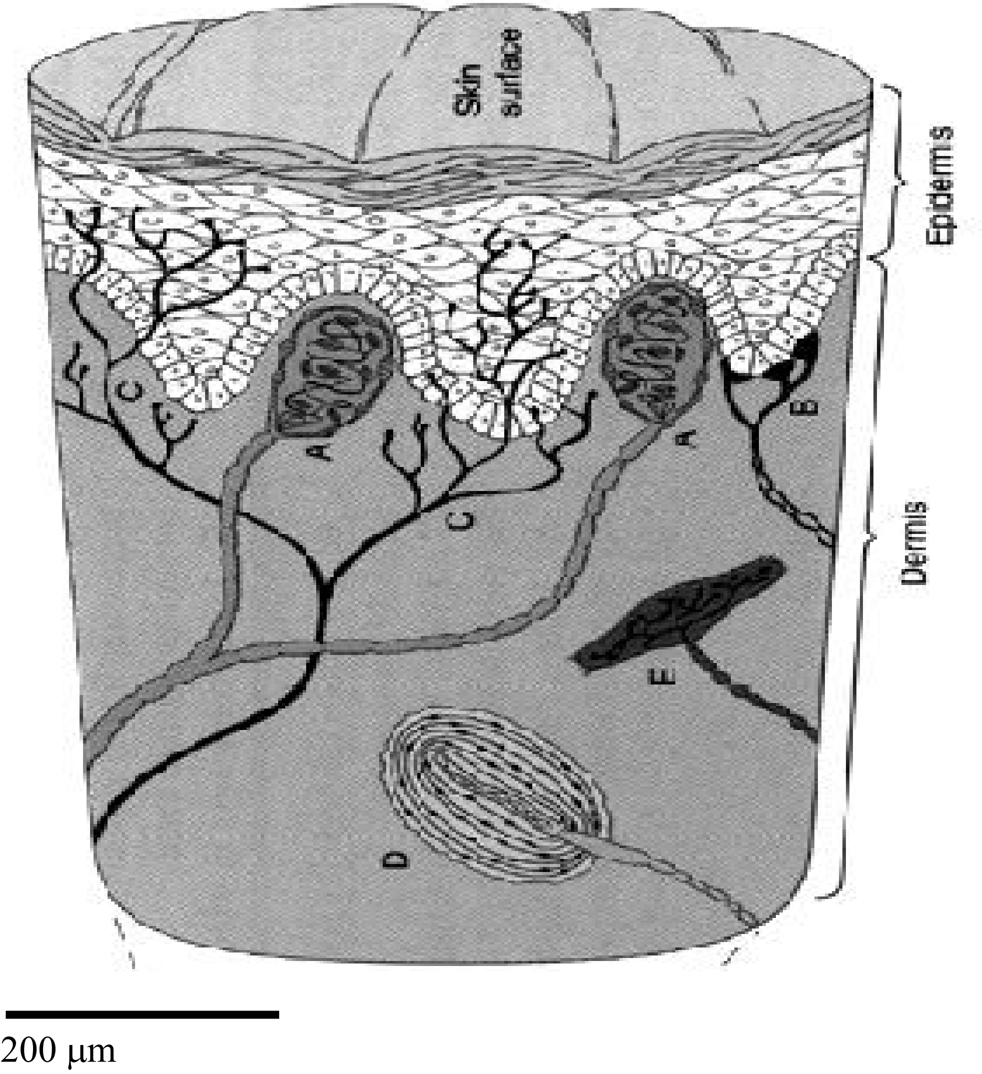
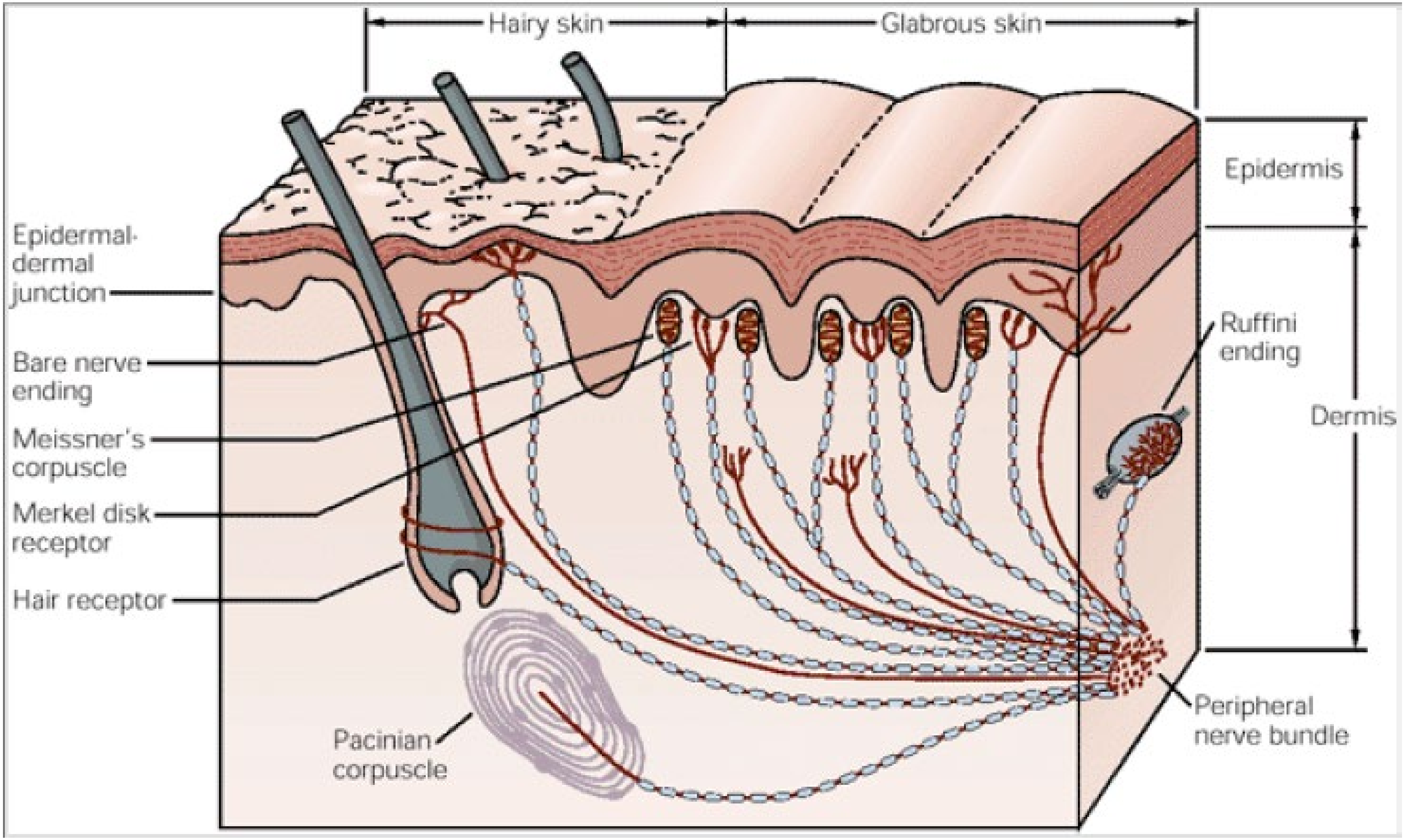


Figure 8.3 The skin harbors a variety of morphologically distinct mechanoreceptors. This diagram represents the smooth, hairless (also called glabrous) skin of the fingertip. The major characteristics of the various receptor types are summarized in Table 8.1. (After Darian-Smith, 1984.)

Mechanoreception underneath the skin



Mechanoreception underneath the skin



Body-world interface

Underneath the skin

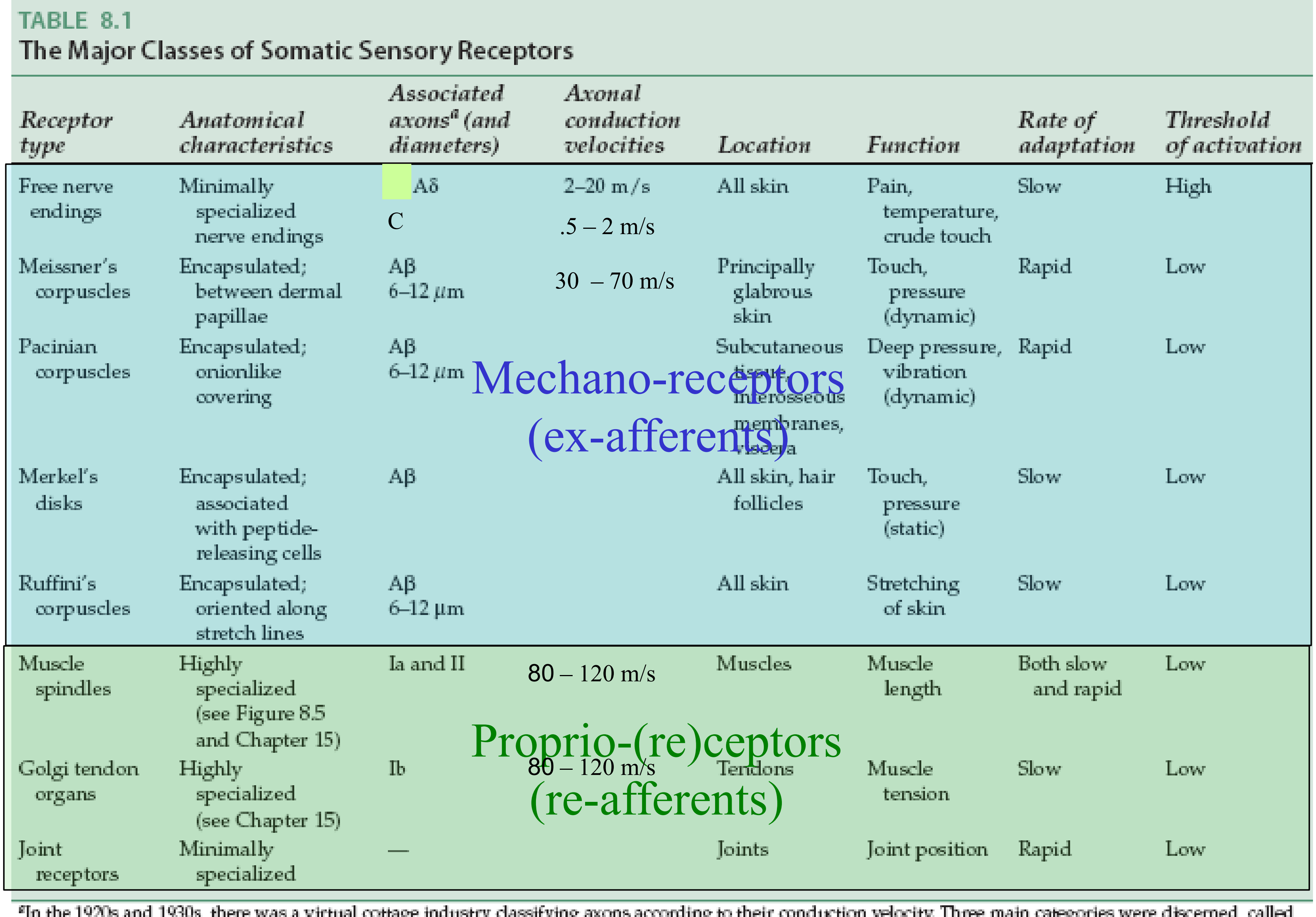


TABLE 8.1
The Major Classes of Somatic Sensory Receptors

Receptor type	*Anatomical characteristics*	*Associated axons^a (and diameters)*	*Axonal conduction velocities*	*Location*	*Function*	*Rate of adaptation*	*Threshold of activation*
Free nerve endings	Minimally specialized nerve endings	Aδ C	2–20 m/s .5 – 2 m/s	All skin	Pain, temperature, crude touch	Slow	High
Meissner's corpuscles	Encapsulated; between dermal papillae	Aβ 6–12 μm	30 – 70 m/s	Principally glabrous skin	Touch, pressure (dynamic)	Rapid	Low
Pacinian corpuscles	Encapsulated; onionlike covering	Aβ 6–12 μm		Subcutaneous tissue, interosseous membranes, viscera	Deep pressure, vibration (dynamic)	Rapid	Low
Merkel's disks	Encapsulated; associated with peptide-releasing cells	Aβ		All skin, hair follicles	Touch, pressure (static)	Slow	Low
Ruffini's corpuscles	Encapsulated; oriented along stretch lines	Aβ 6–12 μm		All skin	Stretching of skin	Slow	Low
Muscle spindles	Highly specialized (see Figure 8.5 and Chapter 15)	Ia and II	80 – 120 m/s	Muscles	Muscle length	Both slow and rapid	Low
Golgi tendon organs	Highly specialized (see Chapter 15)	Ib	80 – 120 m/s	Tendons	Muscle tension	Slow	Low
Joint receptors	Minimally specialized	—		Joints	Joint position	Rapid	Low

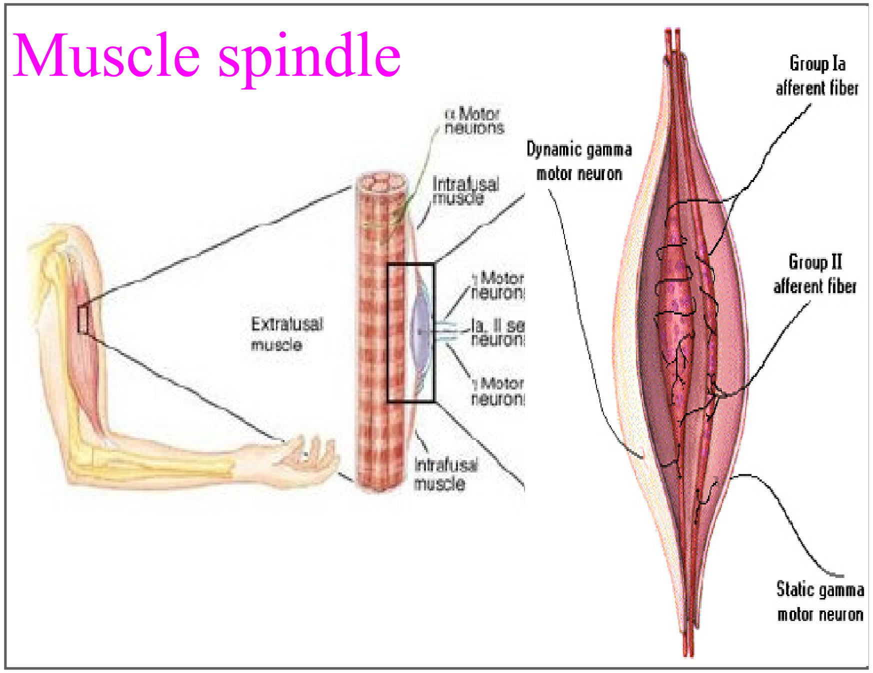
Mechano-receptors (ex-afferents)

Proprio-(re)ceptors (re-afferents)

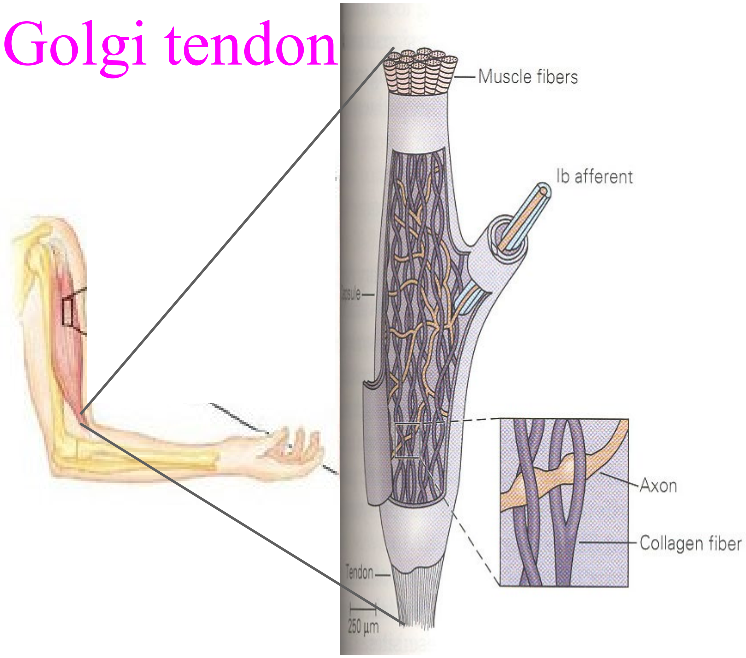
---

[a] In the 1920s and 1930s, there was a virtual cottage industry classifying axons according to their conduction velocity. Three main categories were discerned, called

Muscle spindle

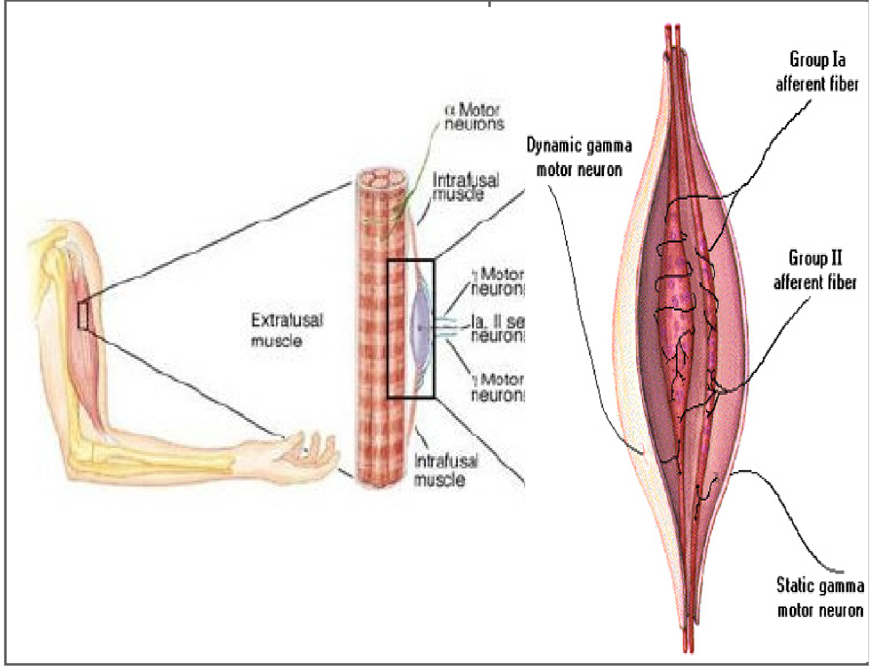


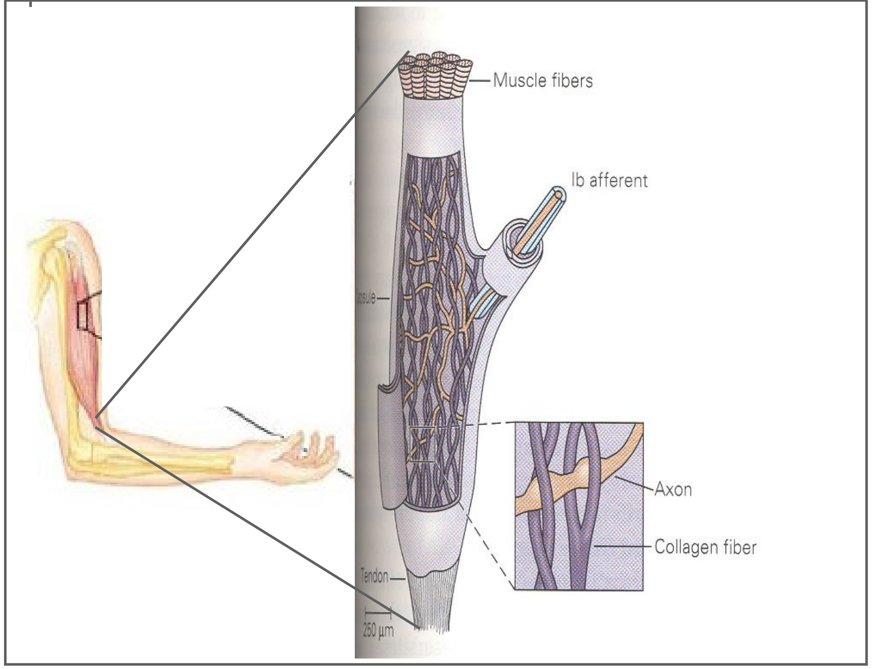
Golgi tendon



Proprioceptive receptor types

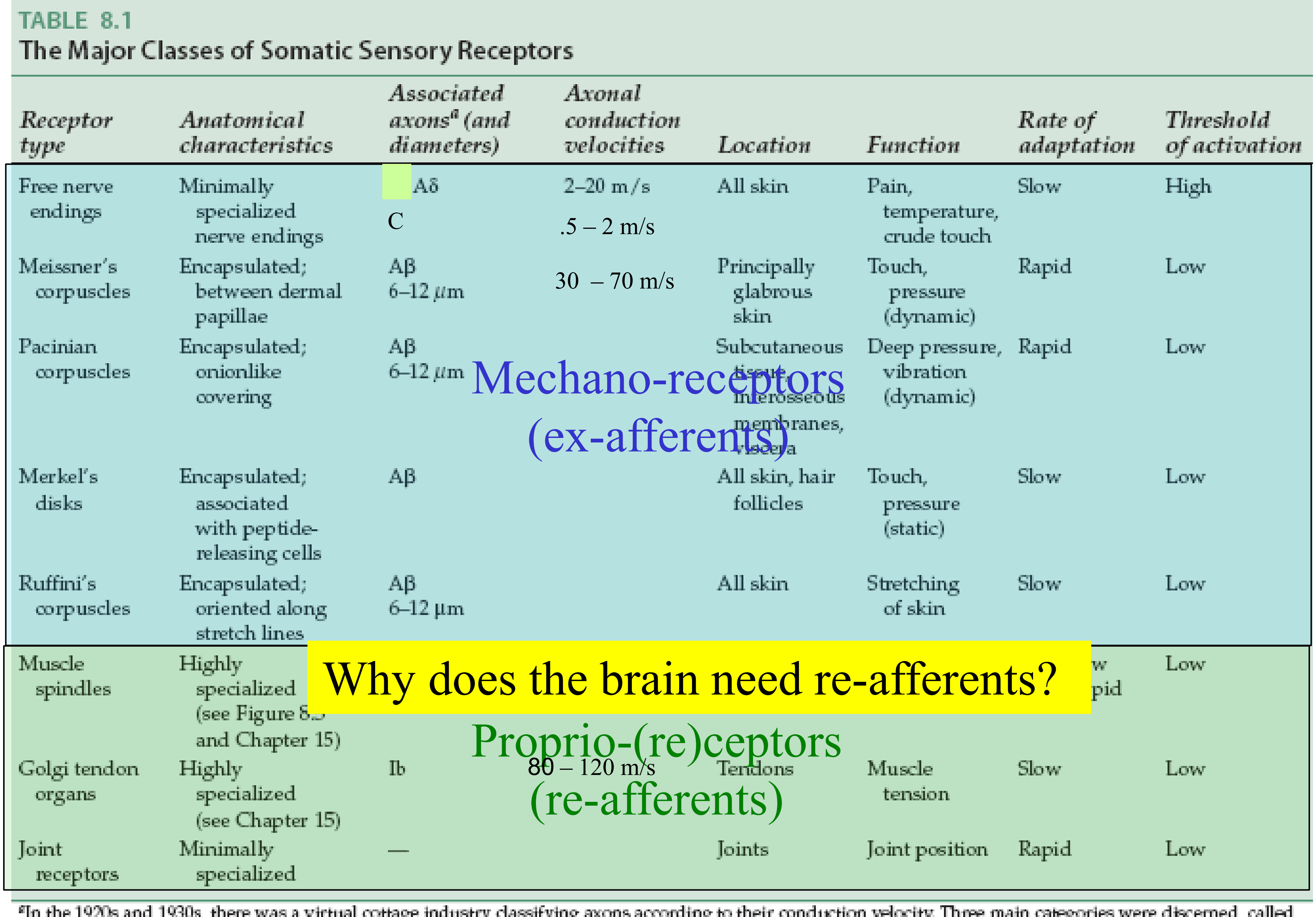
Name:	Muscle spindle receptors	Golgi tendon organs	Joint receptors
Sensitive to:	muscle length change	muscle tension	Joint angle





Body-world interface

Underneath the skin



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Muscle spindles	Highly specialized (see Figure 8. and Chapter 15)					w pid	Low
Golgi tendon organs	Highly specialized (see Chapter 15)	Ib	80 – 120 m/s	Tendons	Muscle tension	Slow	Low
Joint receptors	Minimally specialized	—		Joints	Joint position	Rapid	Low

Mechano-receptors (ex-afferents)

Why does the brain need re-afferents?

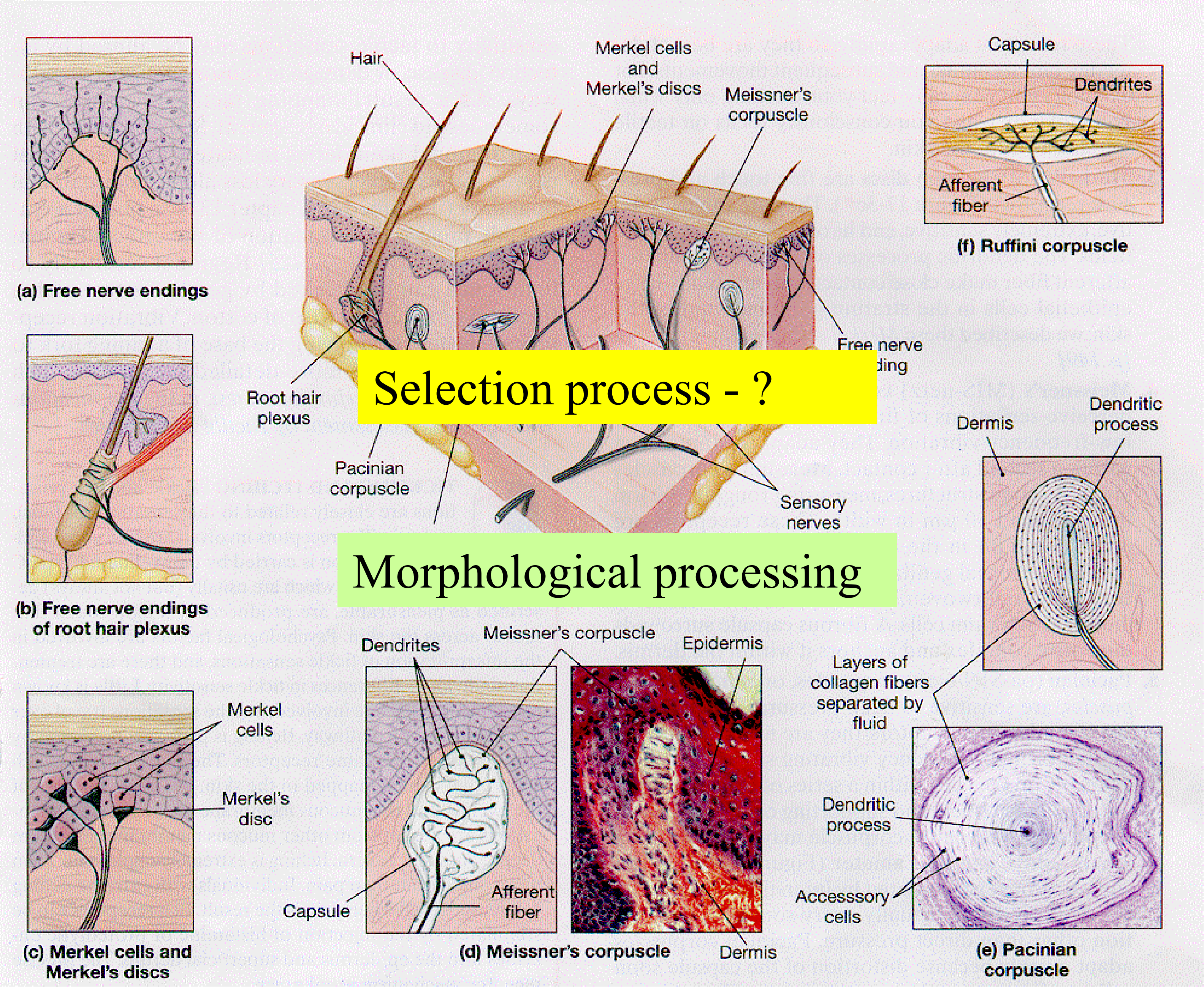
Proprio-(re)ceptors (re-afferents)

---

[a] In the 1920s and 1930s, there was a virtual cottage industry classifying axons according to their conduction velocity. Three main categories were discerned, called

Receptors

Evolutionary specialization



(a) Free nerve endings

(b) Free nerve endings of root hair plexus

(c) Merkel cells and Merkel's discs

(d) Meissner's corpuscle

(e) Pacinian corpuscle

(f) Ruffini corpuscle

Selection process - ?

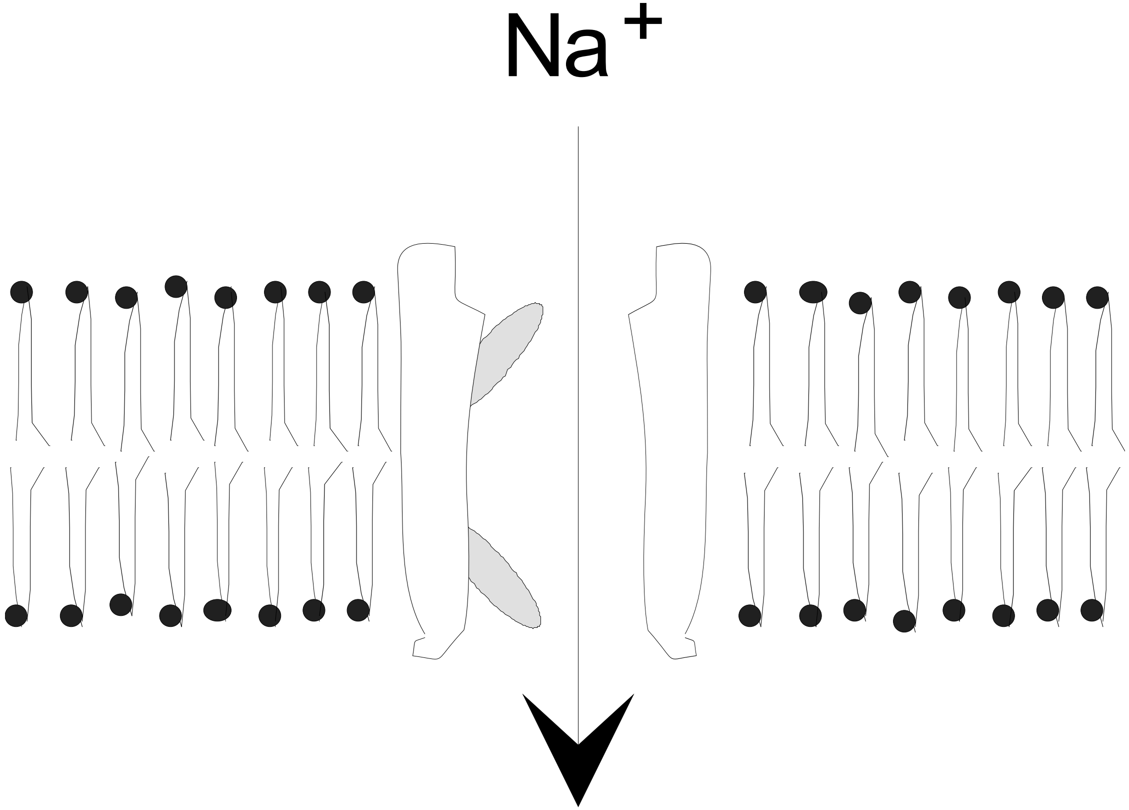
Morphological processing

Signal transduction

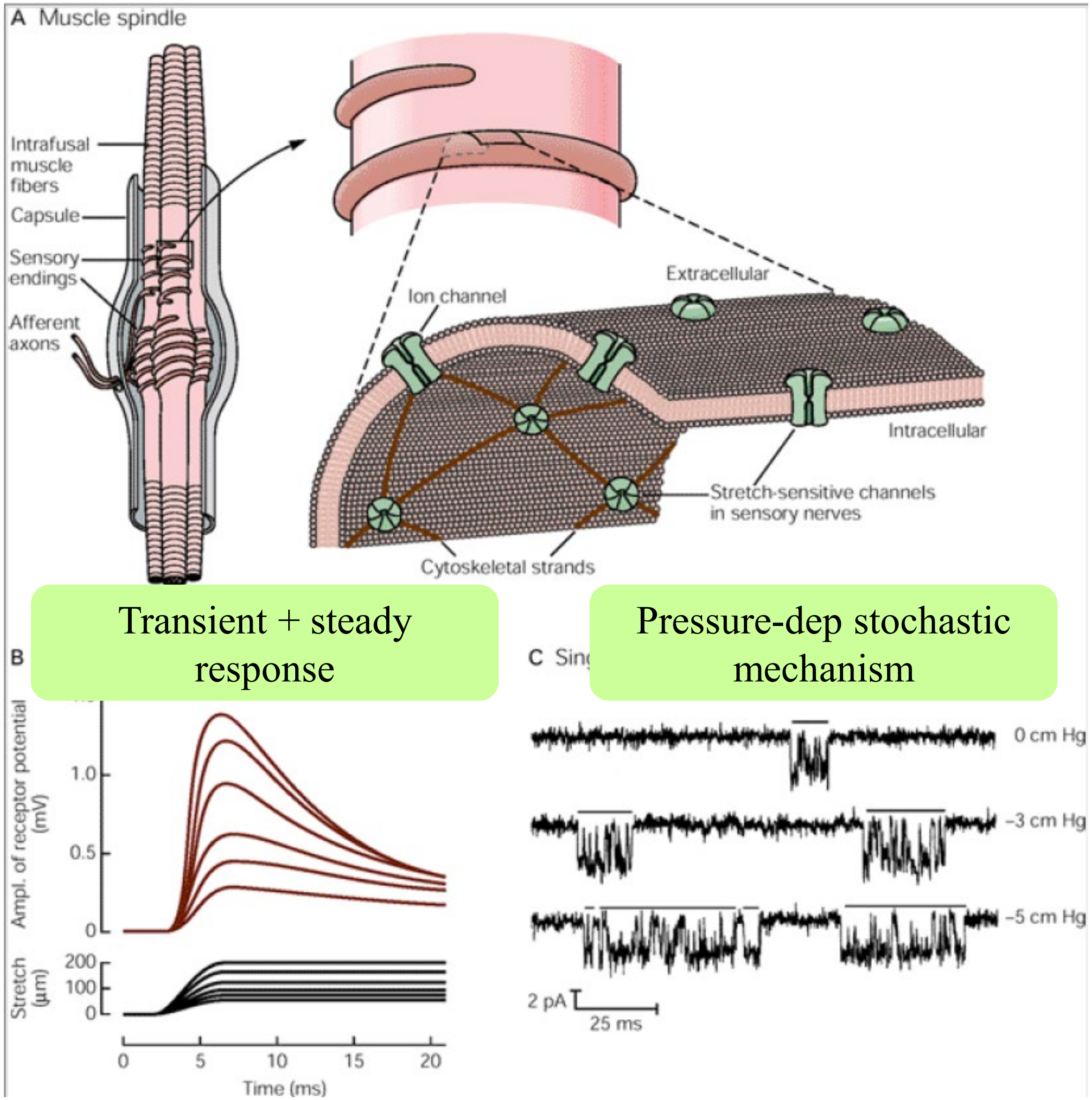
Transduction

The receptor potential is produced by a **mechanically sensitive channel** that opens when the membrane is deformed

The channel is permeable to positive ions, primarily Na^+, K^+ and Ca^{2+}



Transduction



Transient + steady response

Pressure-dep stochastic mechanism

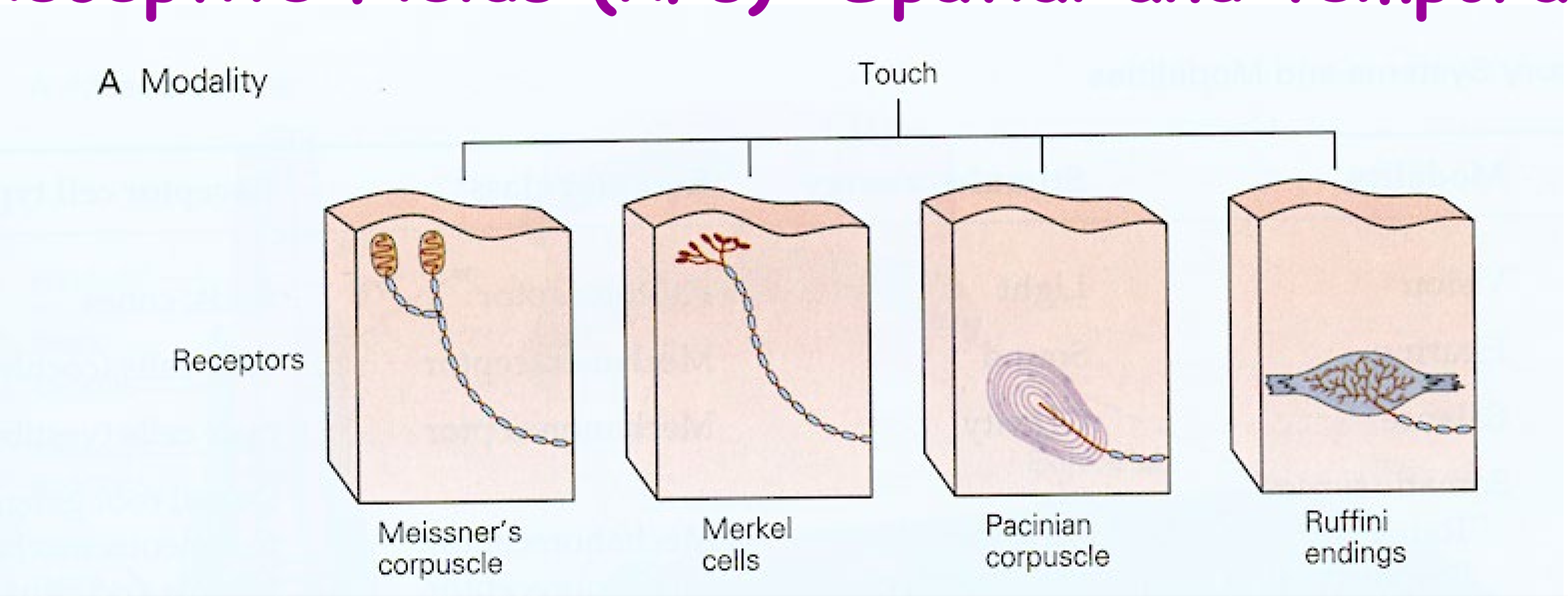
Figure 21-2 Mechanoreceptors are depolarized by stretch of the cell membrane and the depolarization is proportional to the stimulus amplitude.

A. The spindle organ in skeletal muscle mediates limb proprioception. These receptors signal muscle length and the speed at which the

Receptive Fields (RFs):

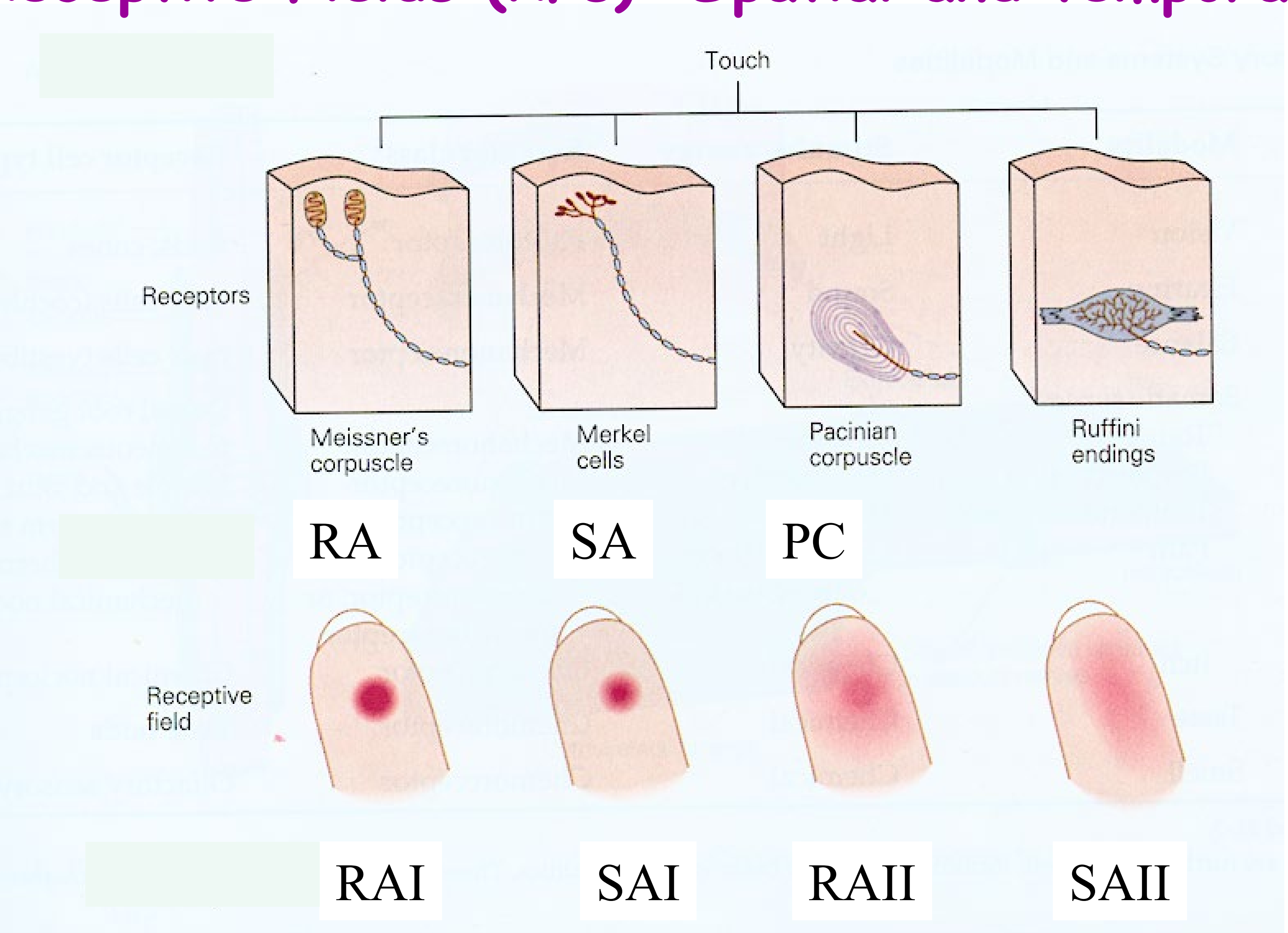
Spatial and temporal

Receptive Fields (RFs): Spatial and temporal



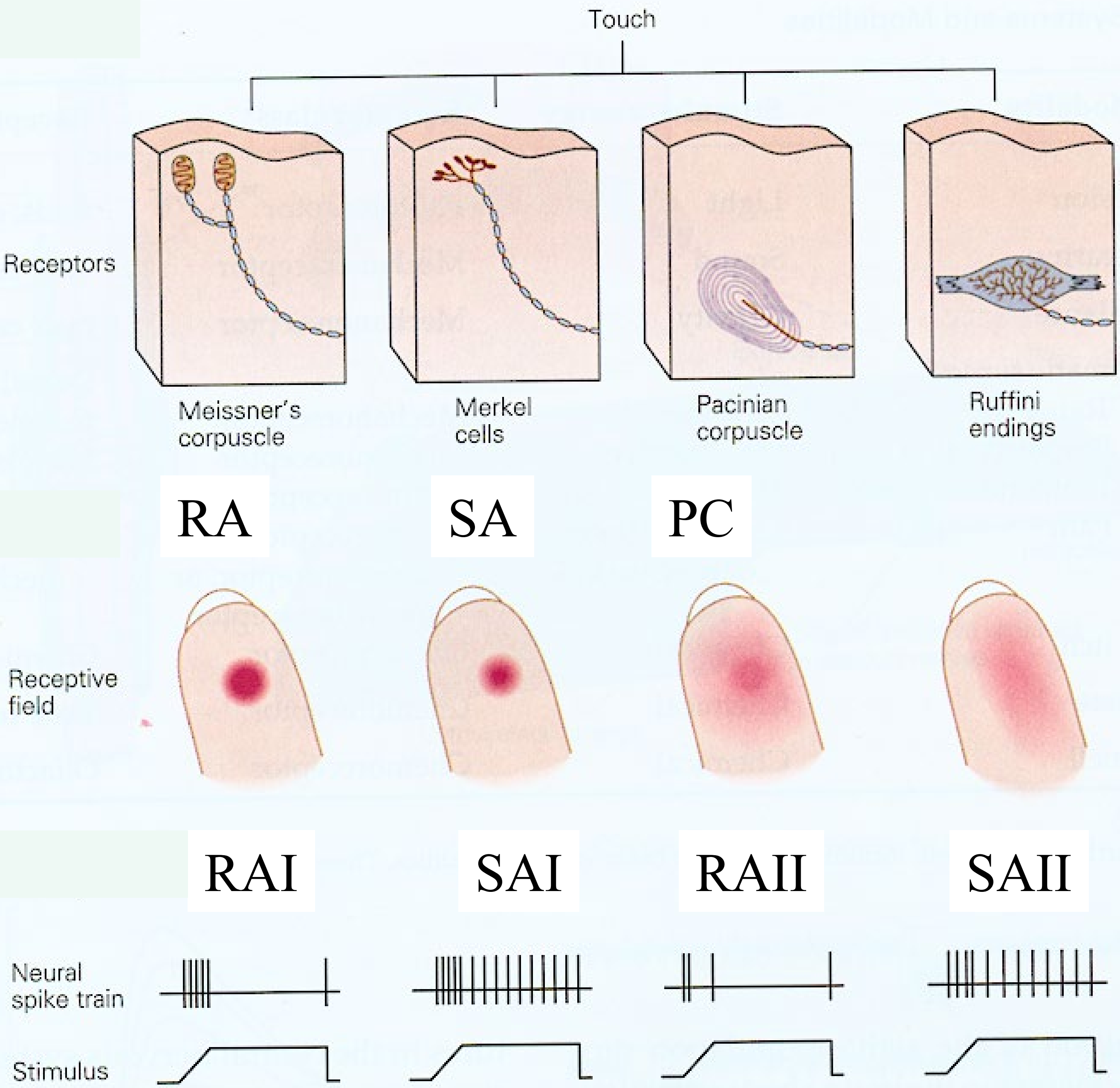
RF size?

Receptive Fields (RFs): Spatial and temporal



Response dynamics?

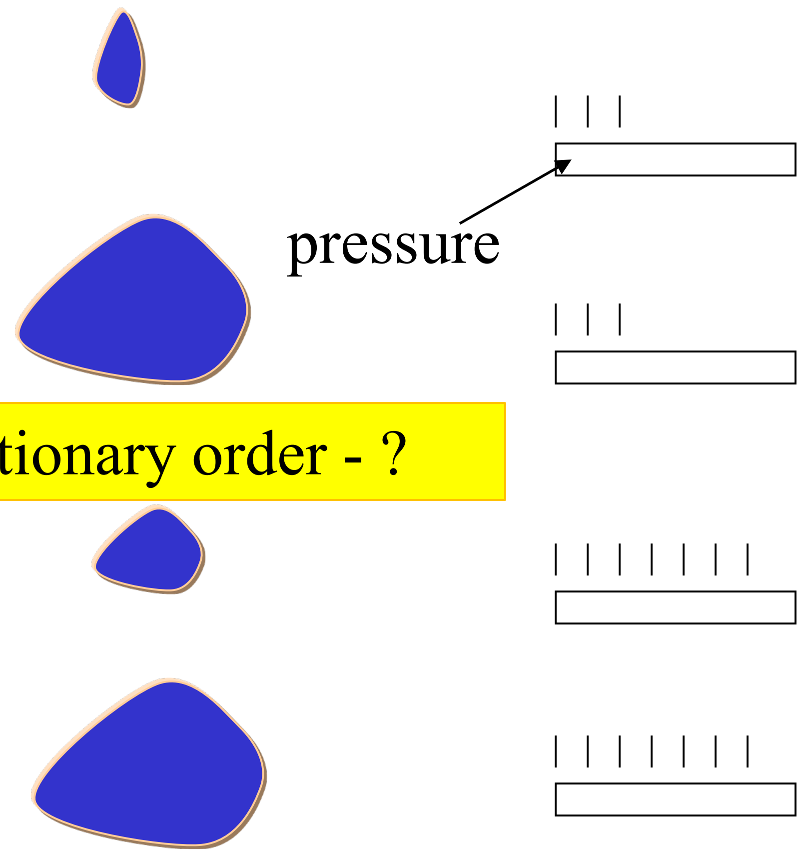
Receptive Fields (RFs): Spatial and temporal



Cutaneous Mechanoreceptor Channels

Receptive Field Size

Temporal adaptation



Rapidly Adapting (RA1)

These are a ssocaited with Meissner’s corpuscles.

Rapidly Adapting (RA2)

These are also called PC because they are associated with Pacinian corpuscles

Evolutionary order - ?

Slowly Adapting (SA1)

Associated with Merkels cells

Slowly Adapting (SA2)

Associated with Ruffini’s endings

Receptor density

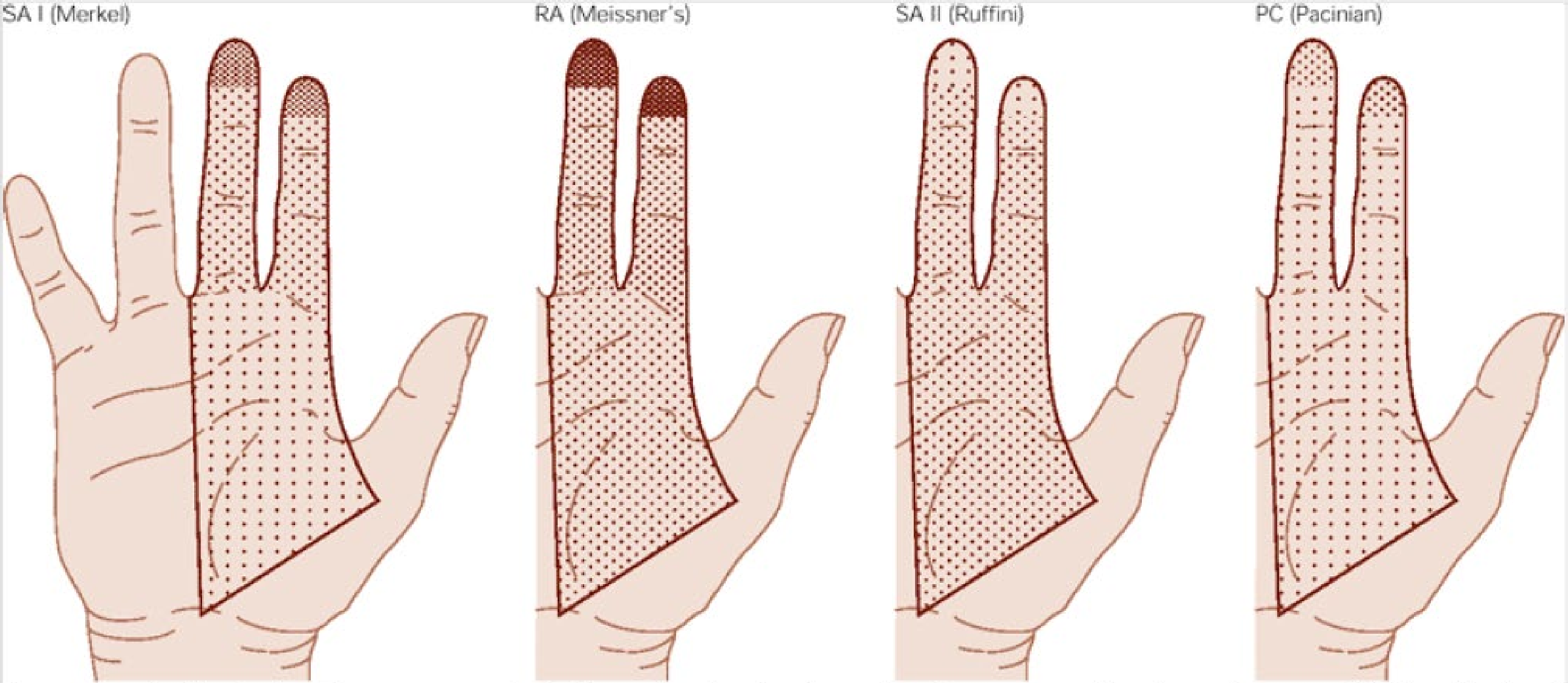
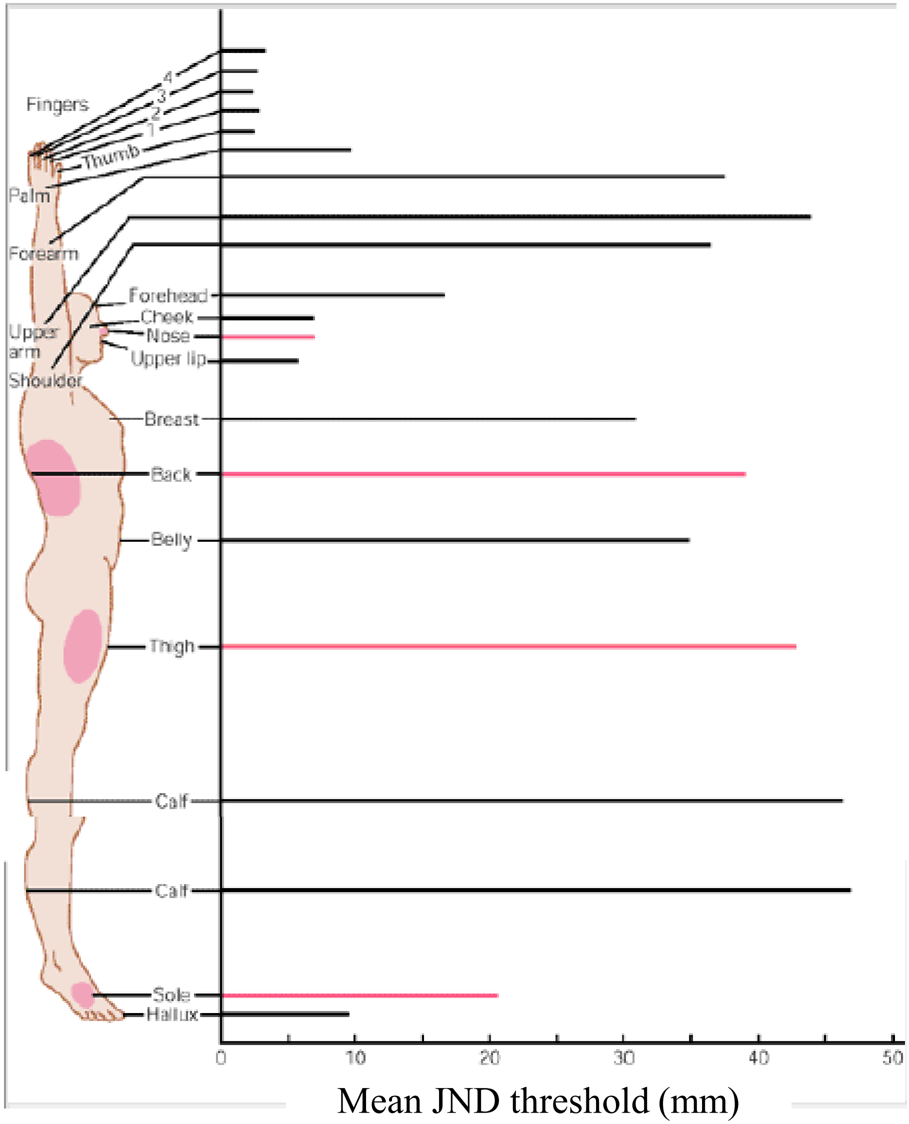


Figure 22-4 The distribution of receptor types in the human hand varies. The number of sensory nerve fibers innervating an area is indicated by the stippling density, with the highest density of receptors shown by the heaviest stippling. (**RA** = 5 rapidly adapting, **SA** = 5 slowly adapting.) Meissner's corpuscles (RA) and Merkel disk receptors (SA I) are the most numerous receptors; they are distributed preferentially on the distal half of the fingertip. Pacinian corpuscles (PC) and Ruffini endings (SA II) are much less common; they are distributed more uniformly on the hand, showing little differentiation of the distal and proximal regions. The fingertips are the most densely innervated region of skin in the human body, receiving approximately 300 mechanoreceptive nerve fibers per square centimeter. The number of mechanoreceptive fibers is reduced to 120/cm^2 in the proximal phalanges, and to 50/cm^2 in the palm. (Adapted from Vallbo and Johansson 1978.)

Neurometric – psychometric matching

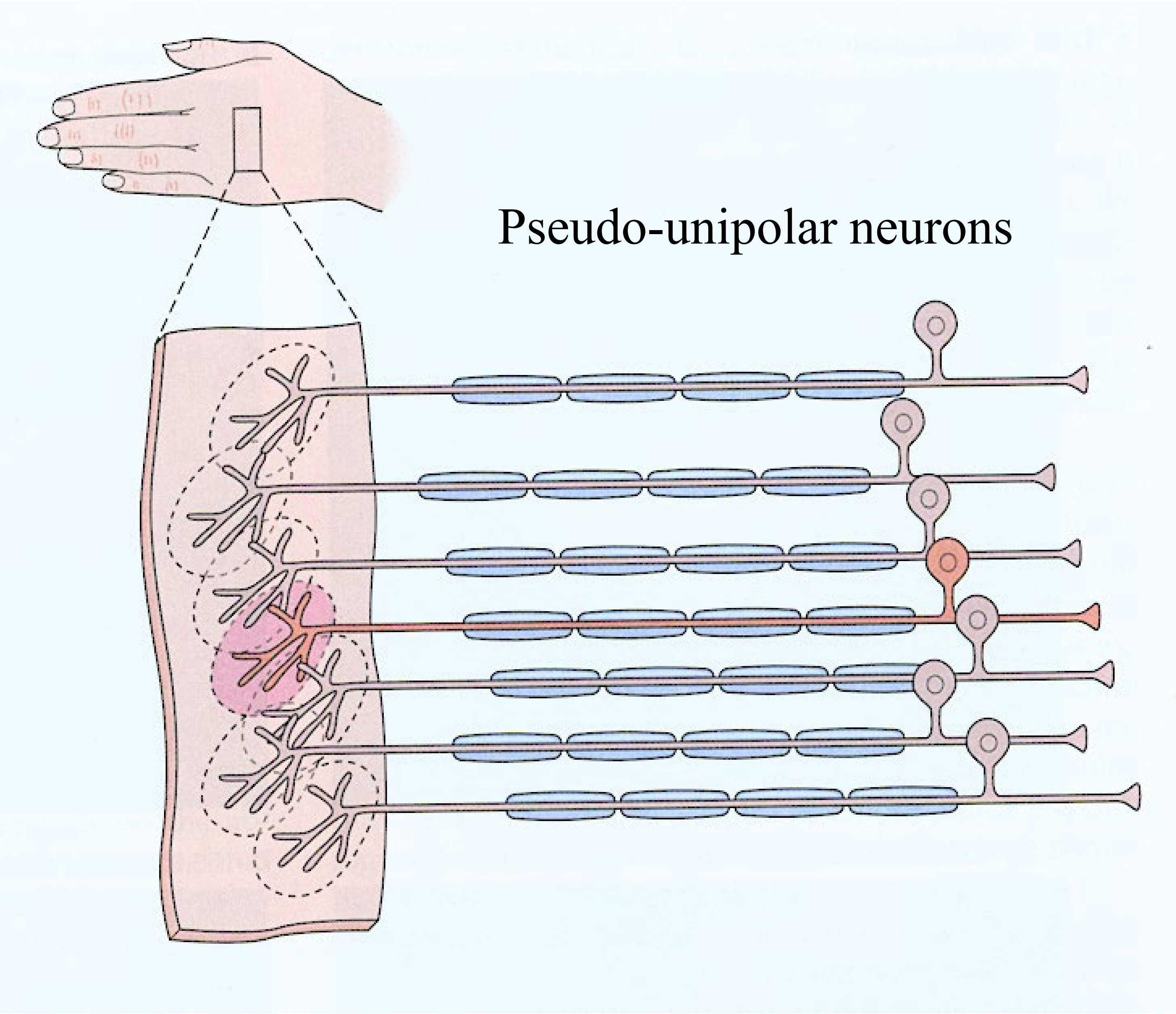
Spatial resolution (by JND)



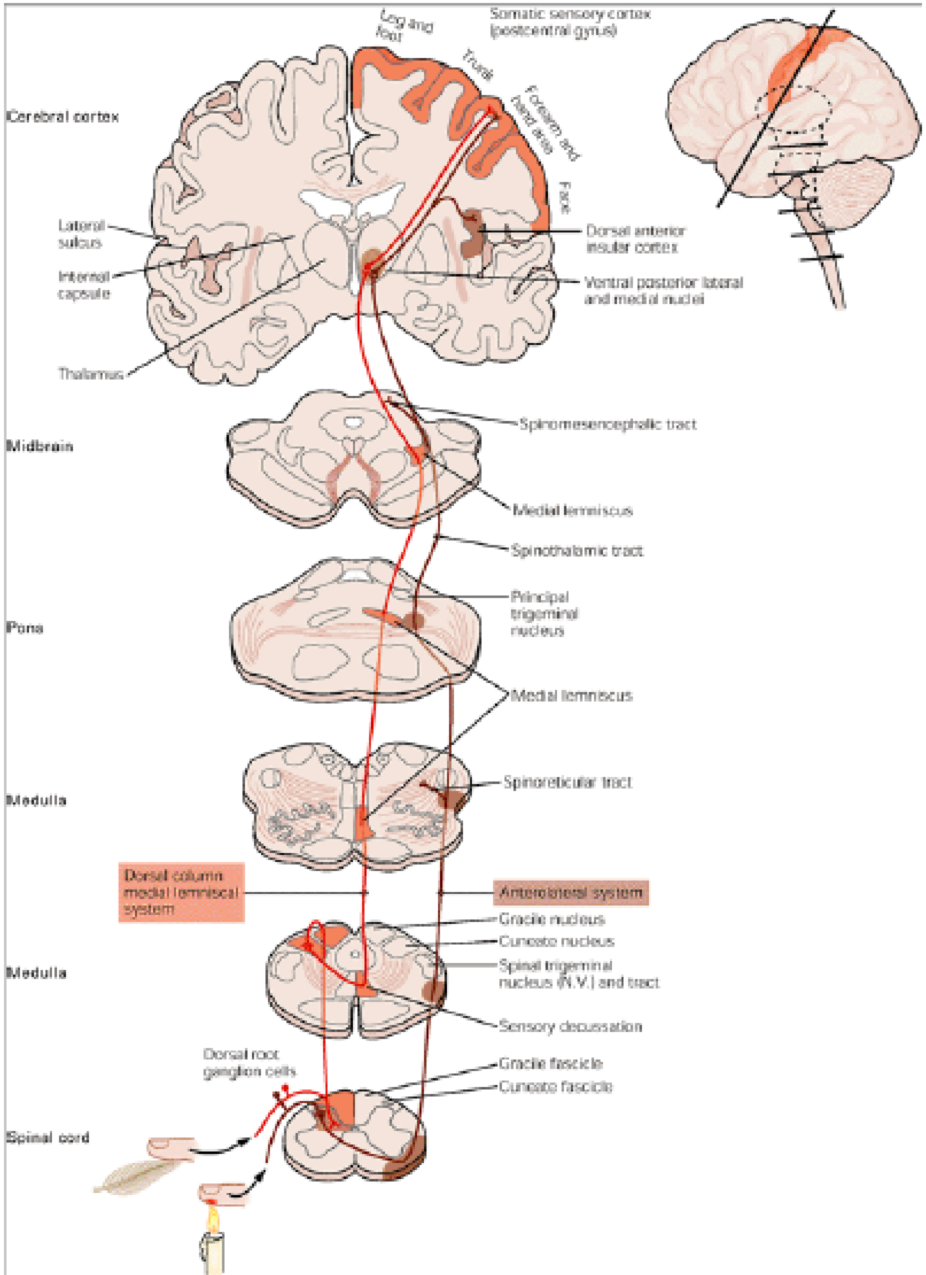
- Break ?

Signal conduction

Sensory signal conduction

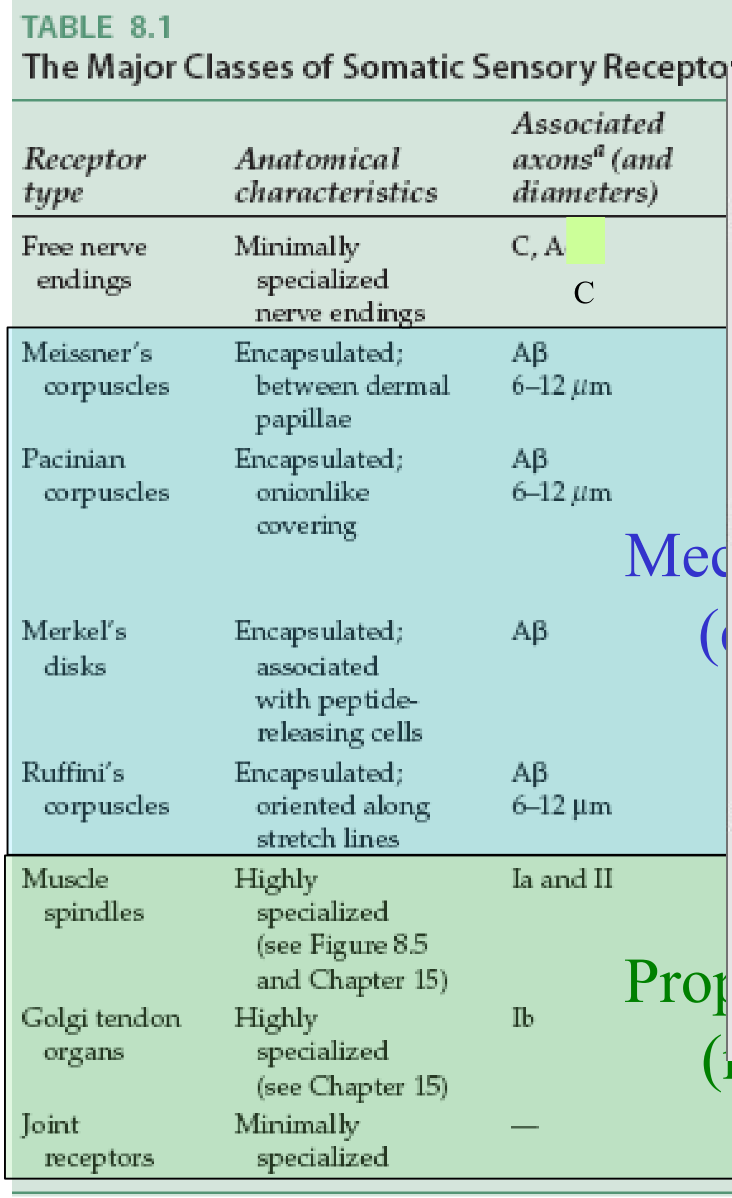


Sensory signal conduction



Sensory signal conduction

Evolutionary order - ?



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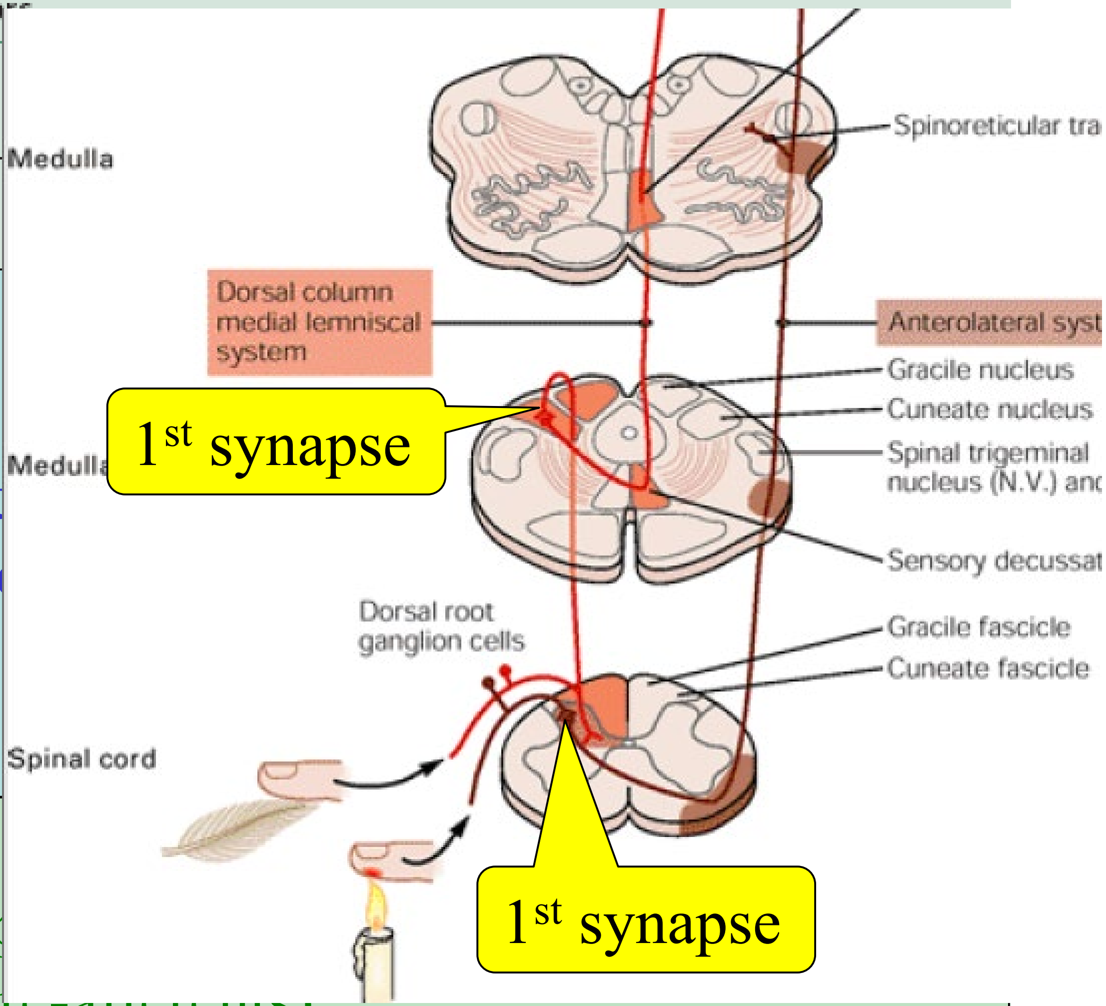
Ruffini's corpuscles	Encapsulated; oriented along stretch lines	Aβ 6–12 μm				
Muscle spindles	Highly specialized (see Figure 8.5 and Chapter 15)	Ia and II				
Golgi tendon organs	Highly specialized (see Chapter 15)	Ib				
Joint receptors	Minimally specialized	—	Joints	Joint position	Rapid	Low

Mec

(c

Prop

(re-afferents)



1st synapse

1st synapse

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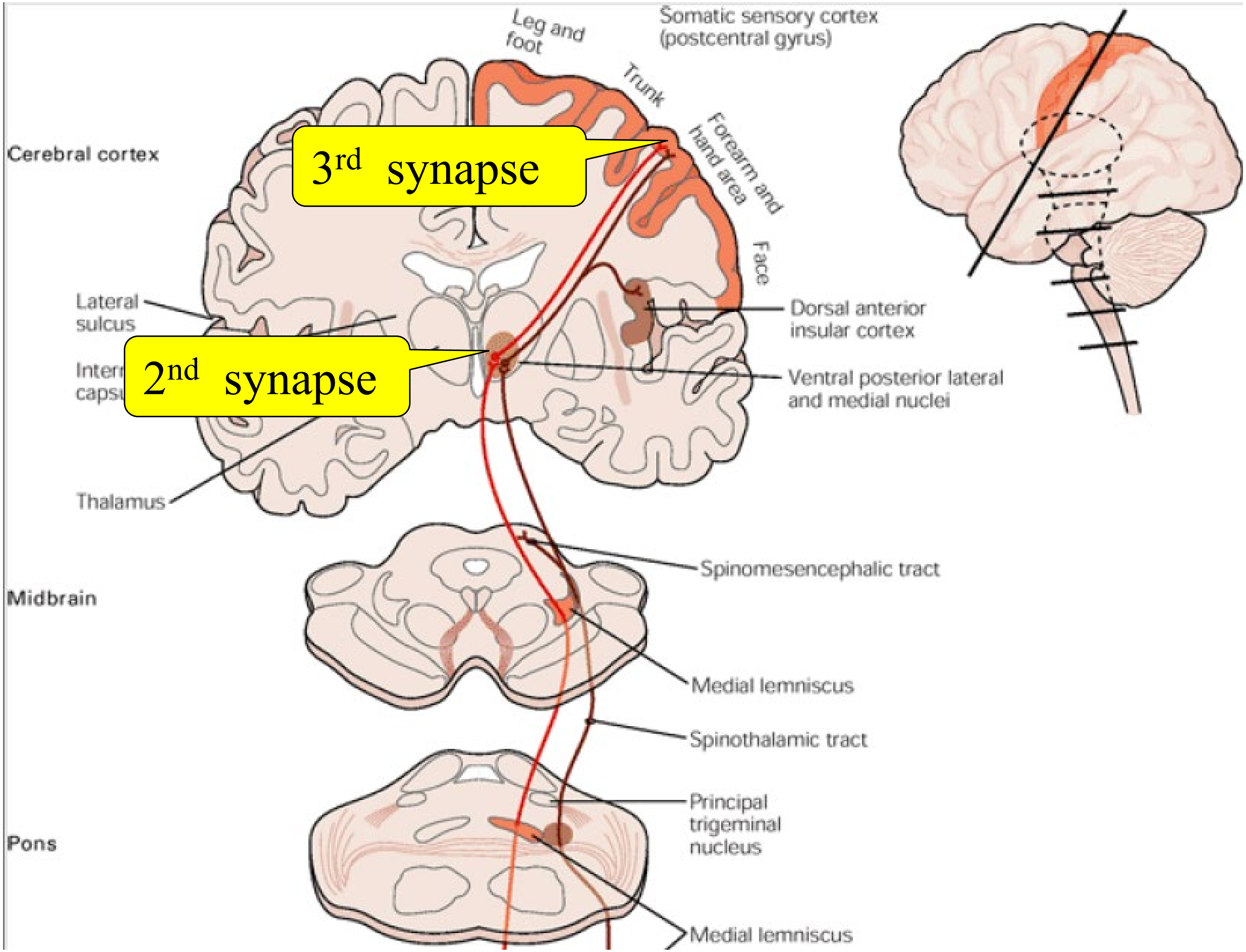
[a] In the 1920s and 1930s, there was a virtual cottage industry classifying axons according to their conduction velocity. Three main categories were discerned, called

Sensory signal conduction



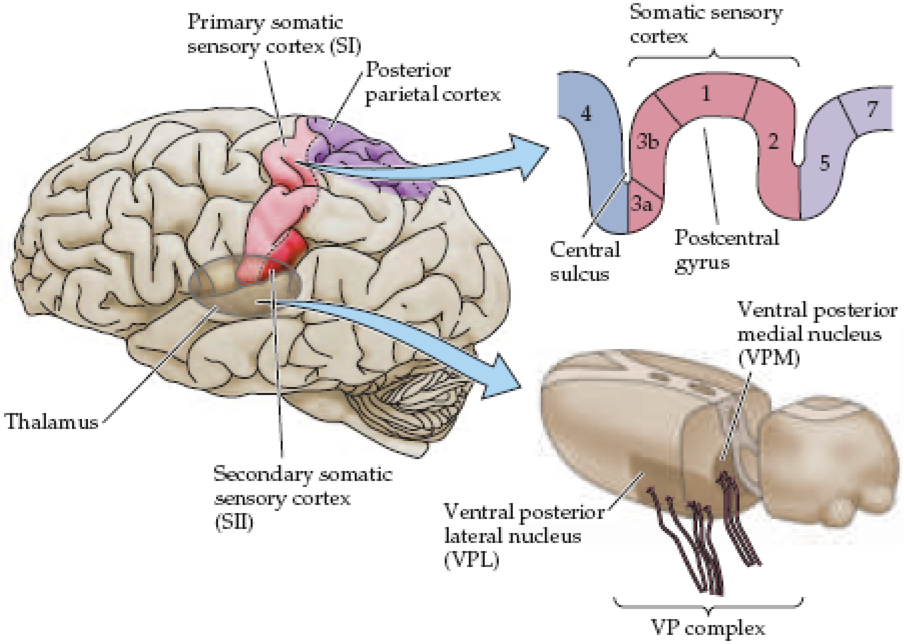
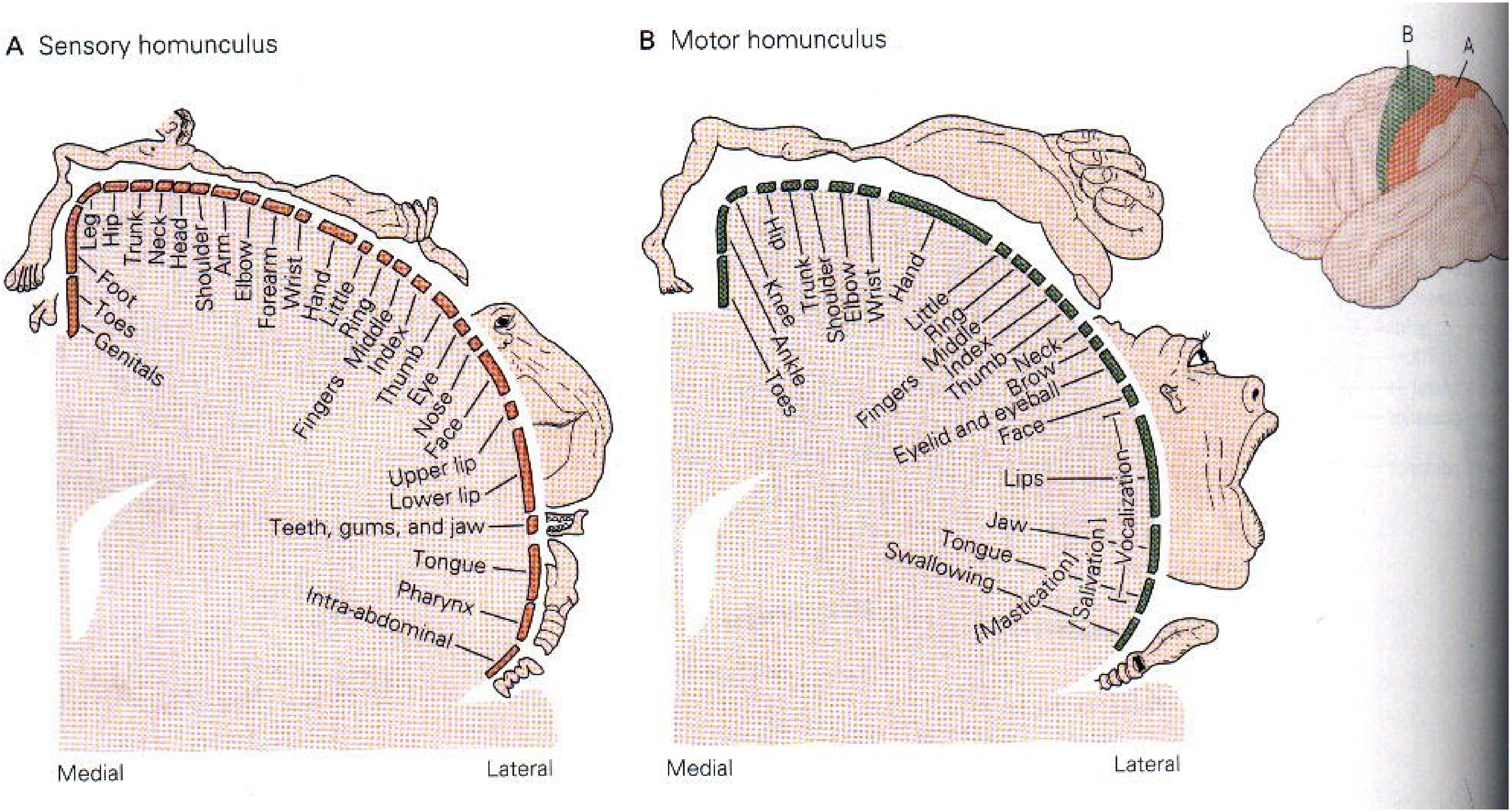


Figure 8.7 Diagram of the somatic sensory portions of the thalamus and their cortical targets in the postcentral gyrus. The ventral posterior nuclear complex comprises the VPM, which relays somatic sensory information carried by the trigeminal system from the face, and the VPL, which relays somatic sensory information from the rest of the body. Inset above shows organization of the primary somatosensory cortex in the postcentral gyrus, shown here in a section cutting across the gyrus from anterior to posterior. (After Brodal, 1992, and Jones et al., 1982.)

The Homunculi



The Homunculi

Relative size reflects innervation density

phylogenetically

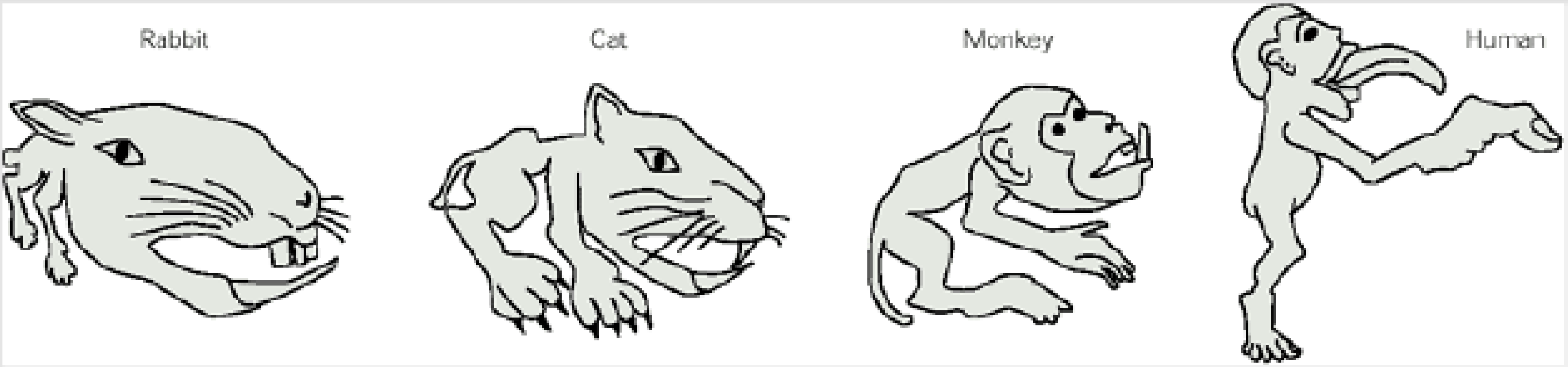


Figure 20-5 Different species rely on different parts of the body for adaptive somatosensory information. These drawings show the relative importance of body regions in the somatic sensibilities of four species, based on studies of evoked potentials in the thalamus and cortex.

The Homunculi

Accurate spatial organization

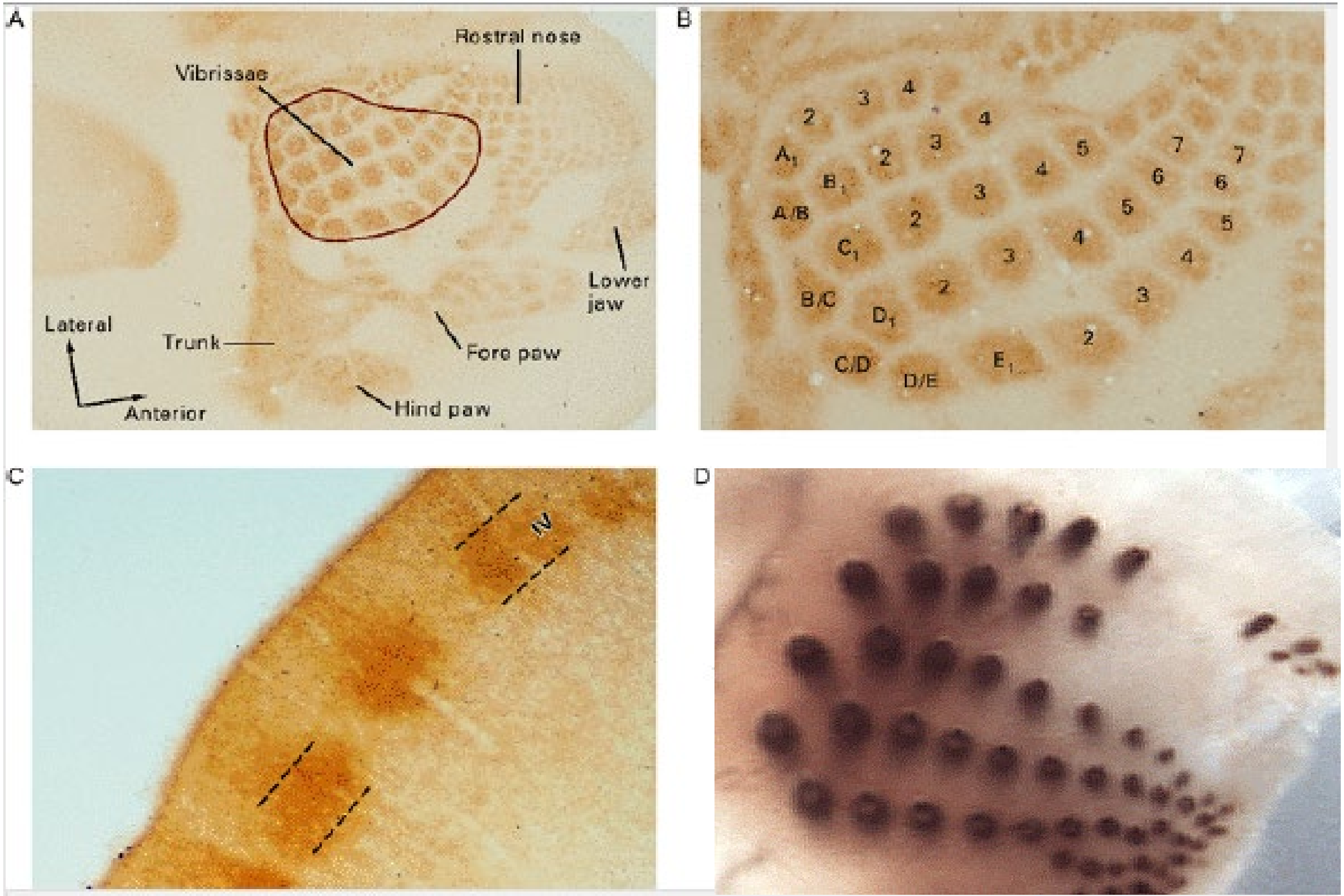
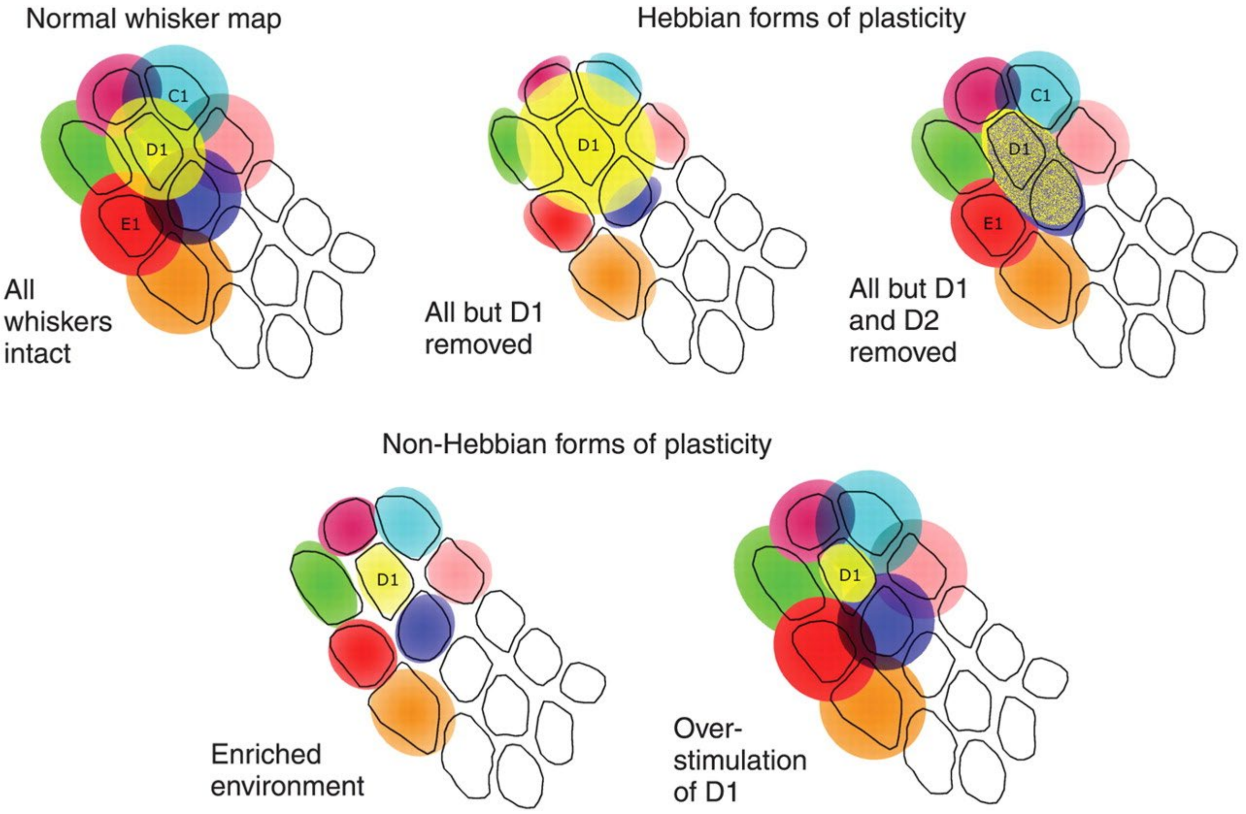


Figure 23-9 The representation of whiskers in the somatosensory cortex of the rat. (Adapted from Bennett-Clarke et al. 1997).

The Homunculi

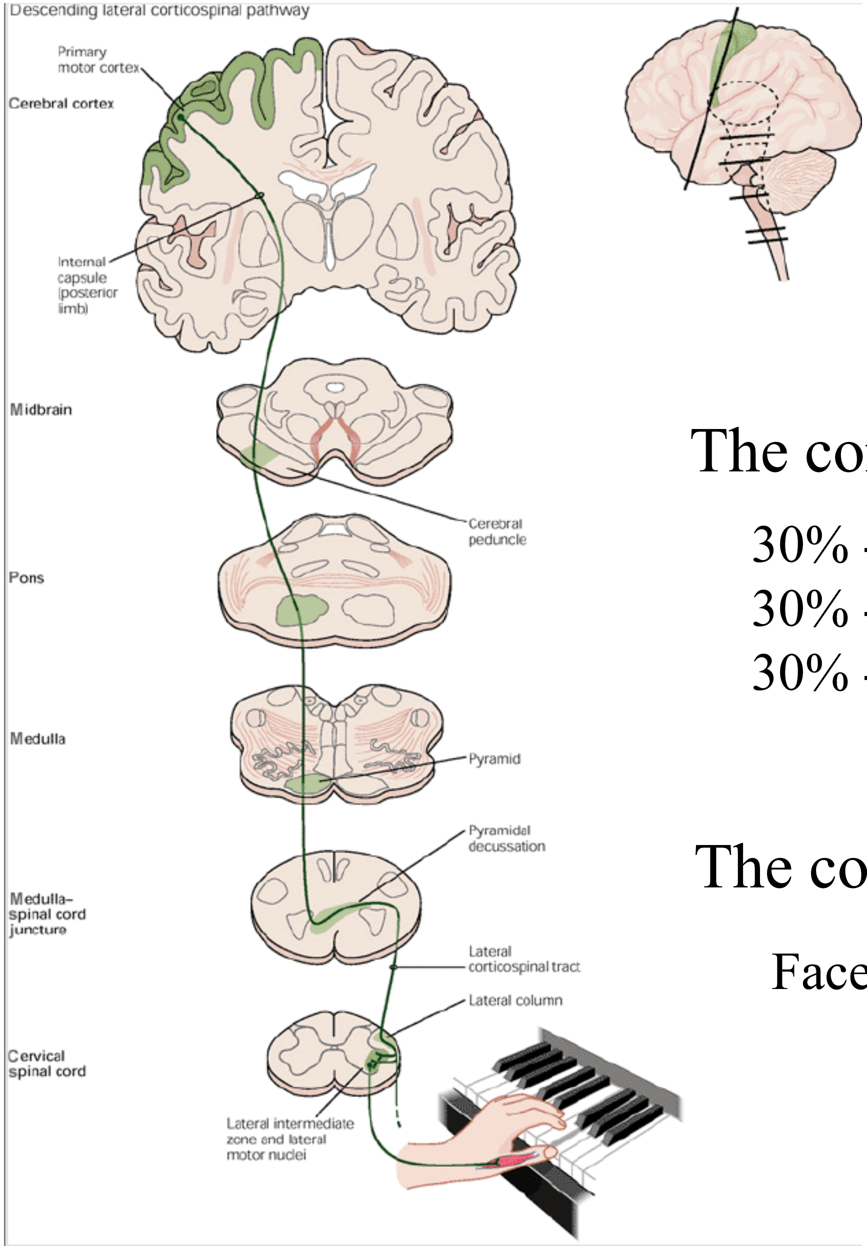
Relative size reflects innervation density

ontogenetically



Daniel E. Feldman, and Michael Brecht Science 2005;310:810-815

Motor signal conduction



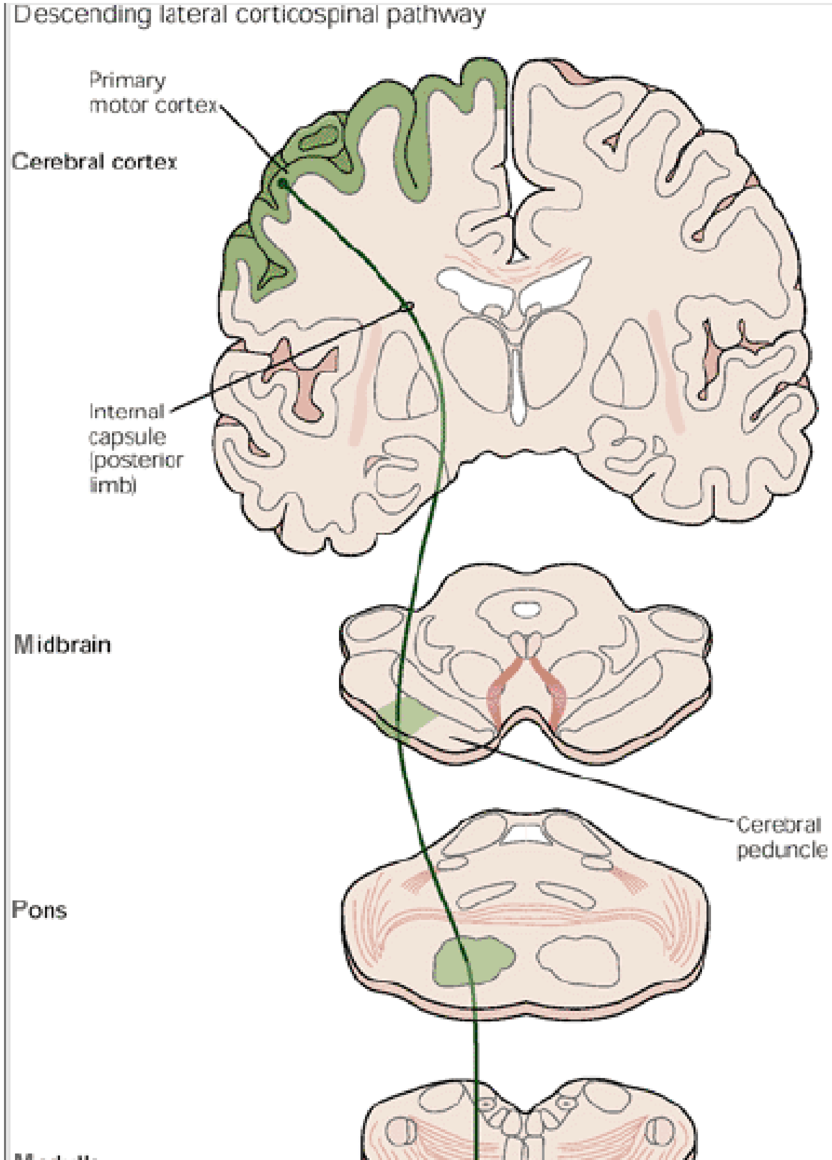
The cortico-spinal tract

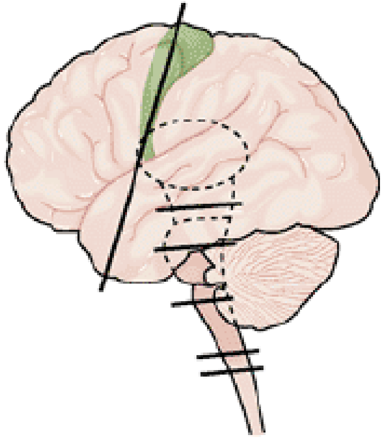
30% - M1
30% - premotor
30% - somatosensory, parietal

The cortico-bulbar tract

Face, head, neck

Motor signal conduction

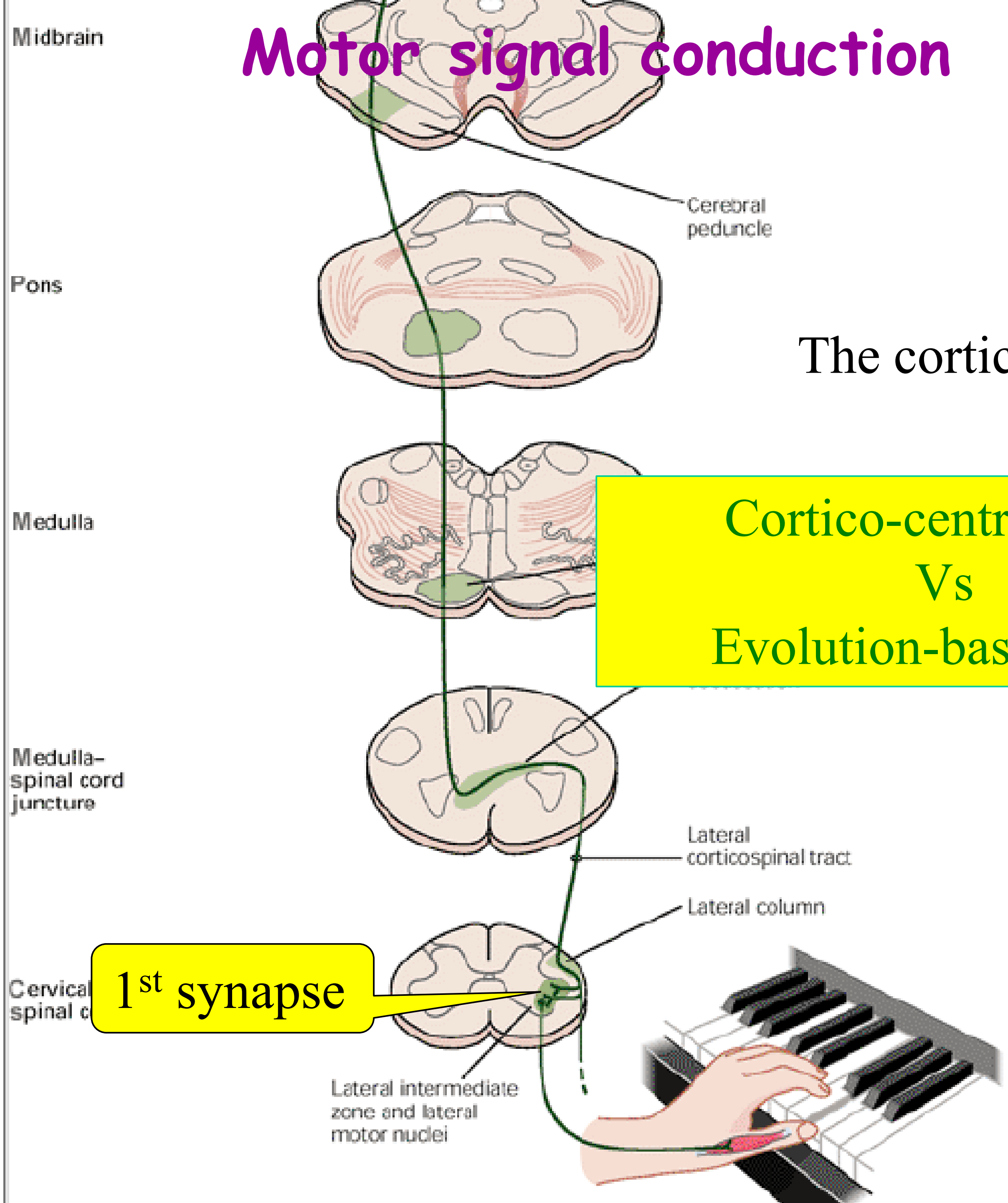




The cortico-spinal tract

(not reversal of the afferent pathway)

Motor signal conduction



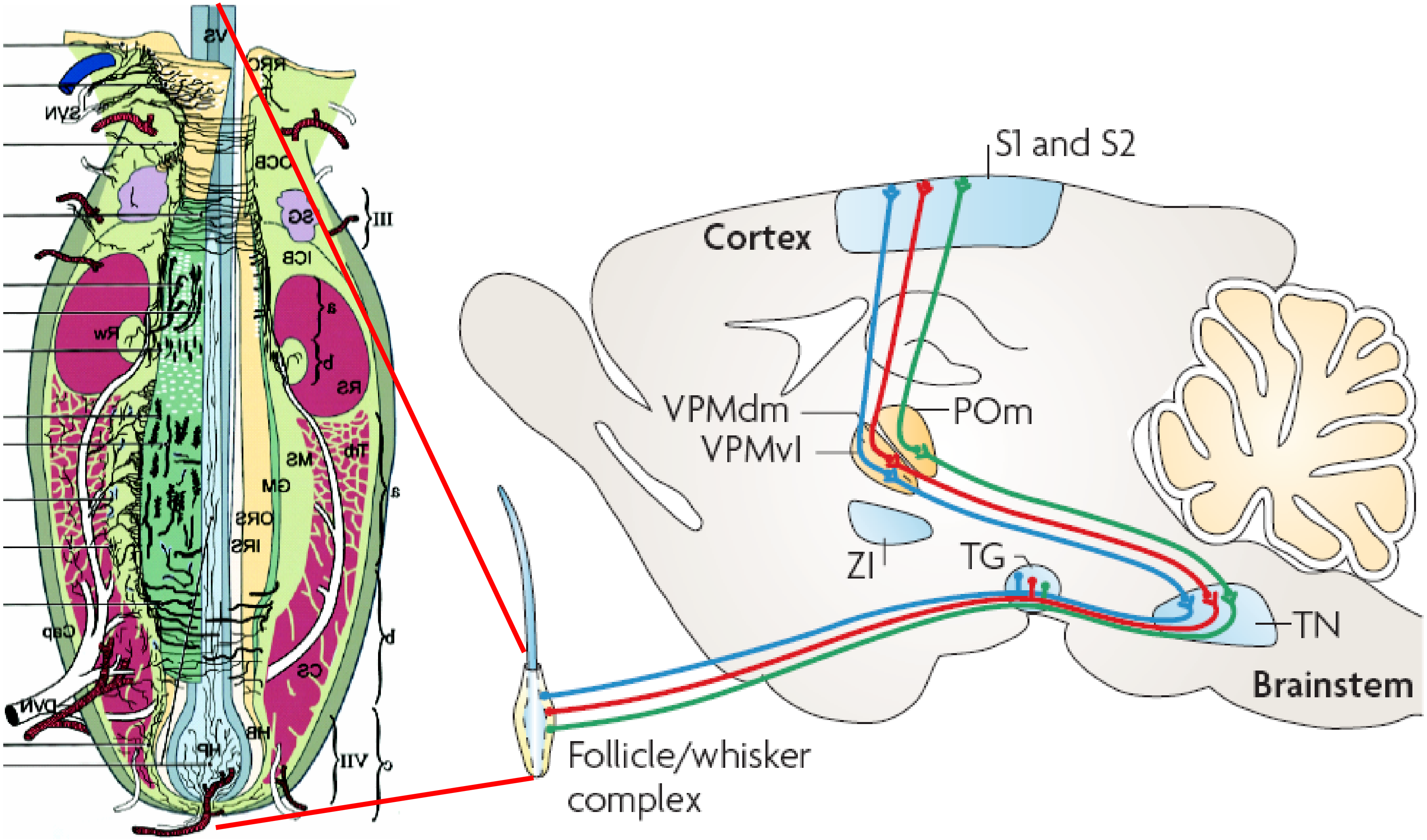
The cortico-spinal tract

Cortico-centric view
Vs
Evolution-based view

1st synapse

Sensory signal conduction

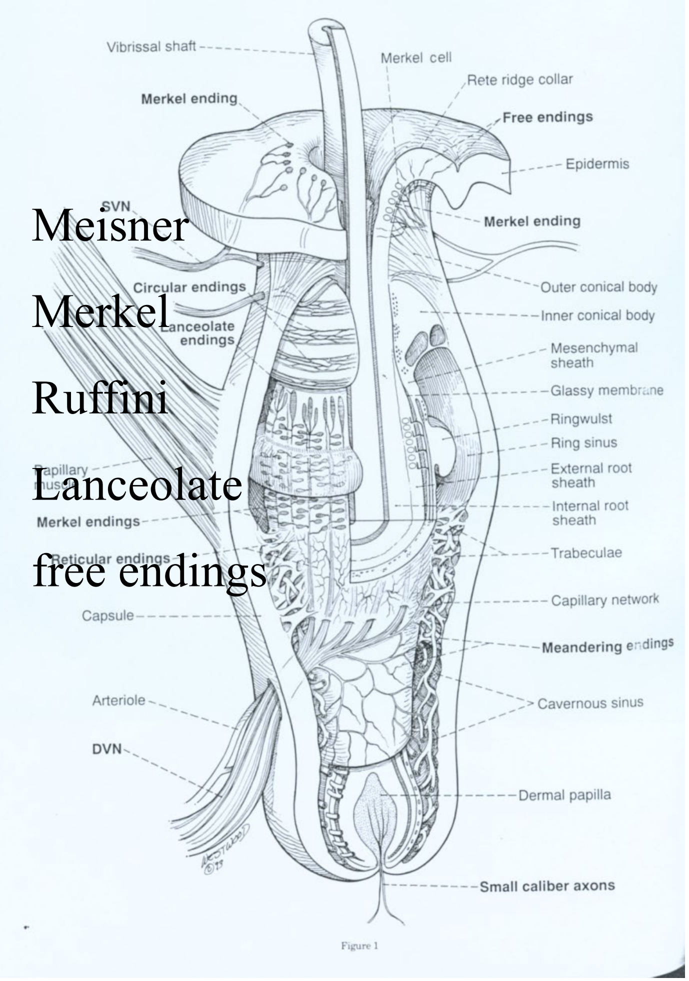
The vibrissal system



Sensory signal conduction

The vibrissal system

whisker



Meisner

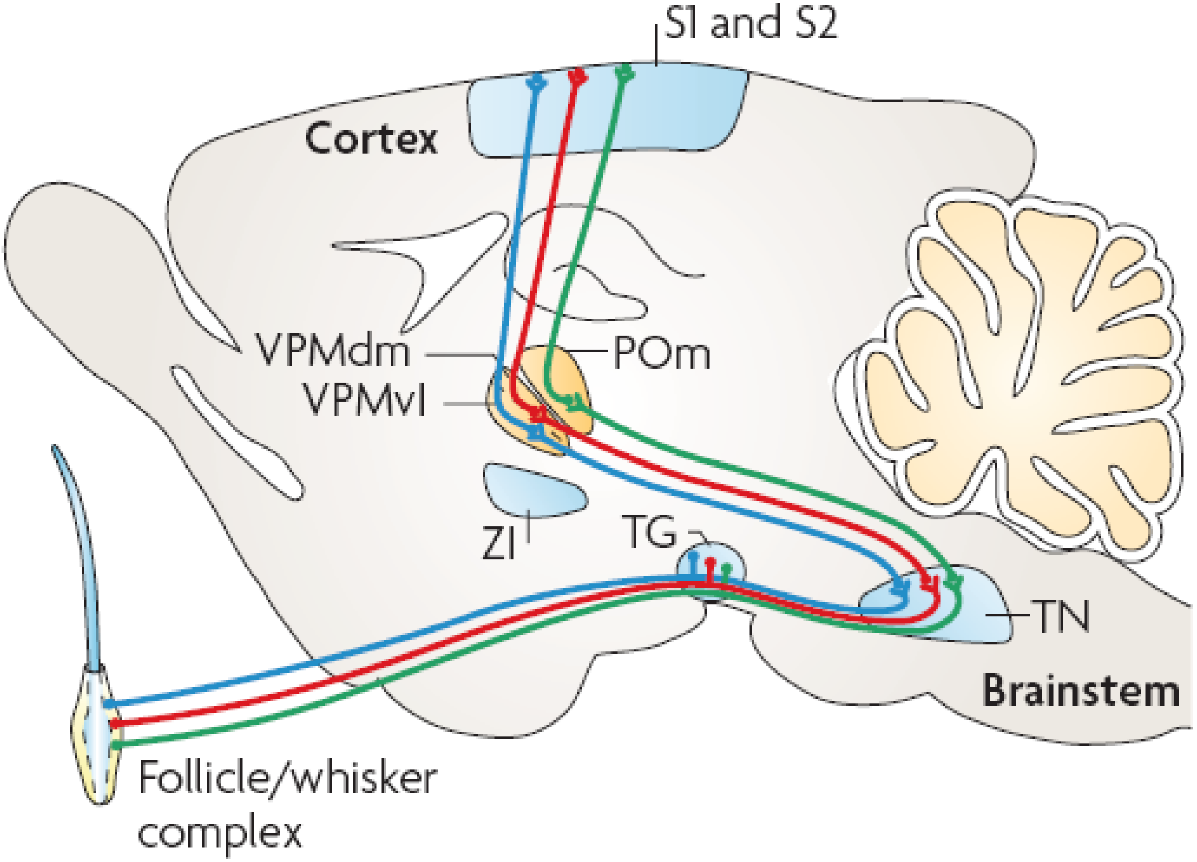
Merkel

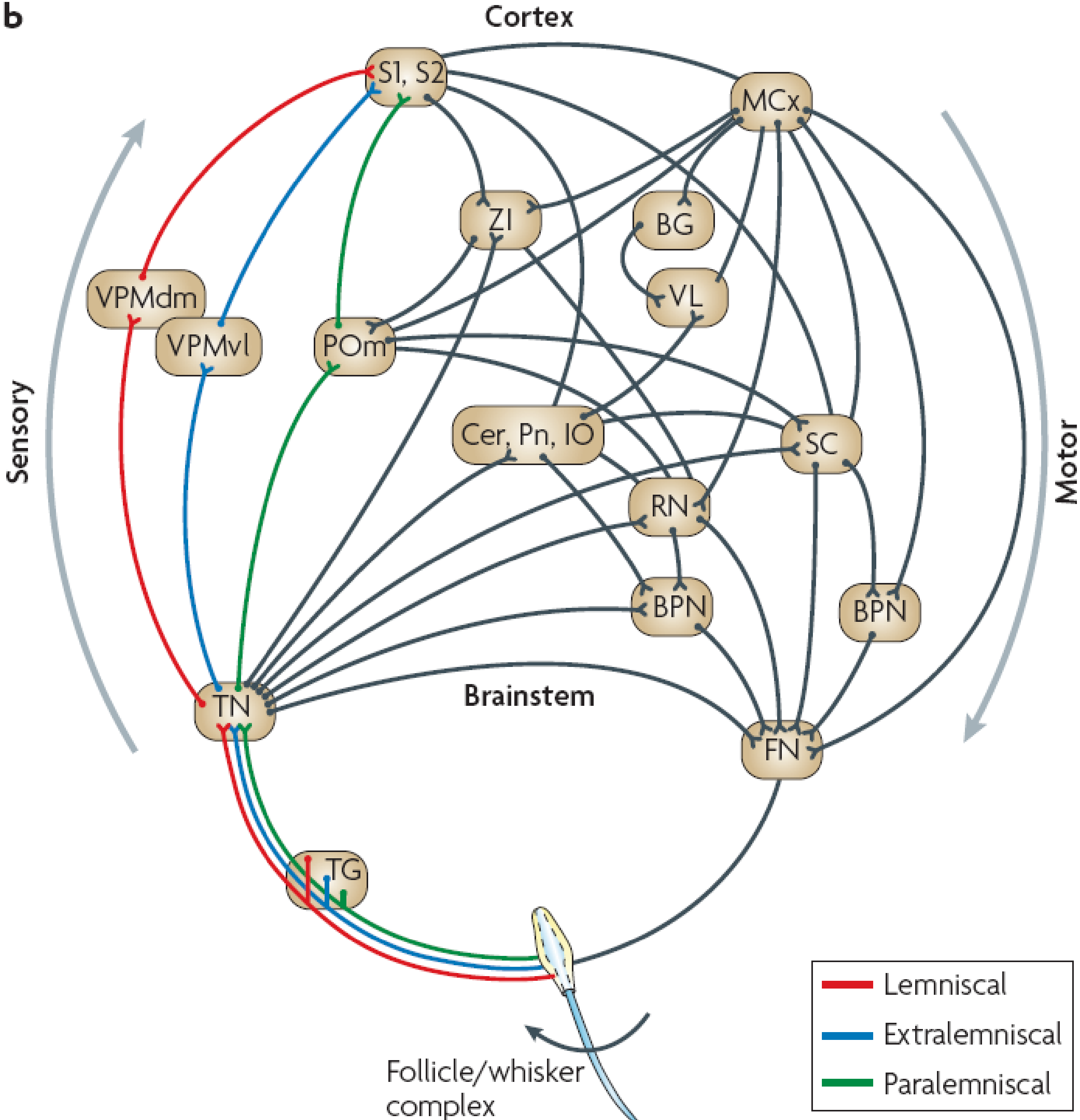
Ruffini

Lanceolate

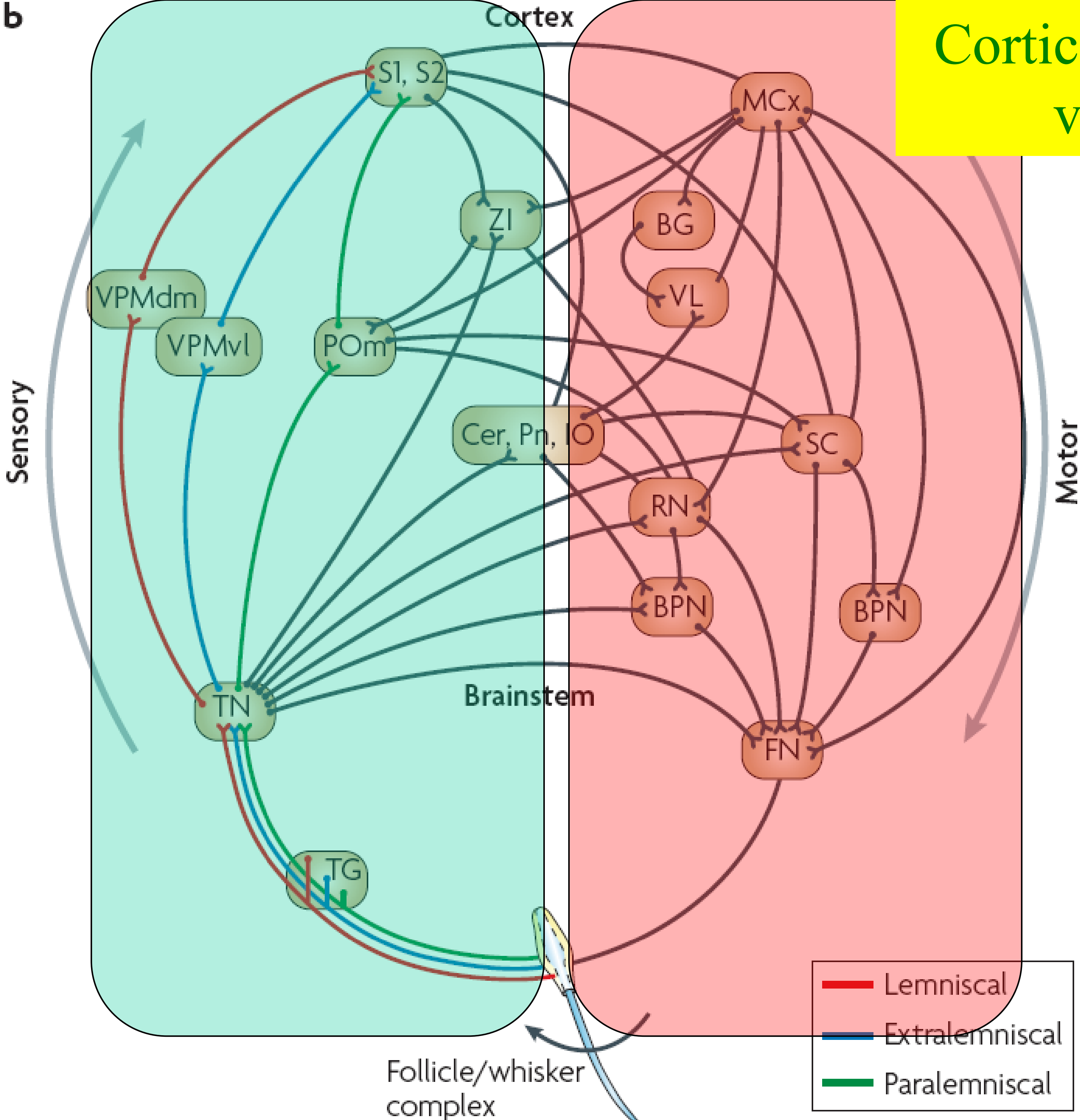
free endings

Figure 1

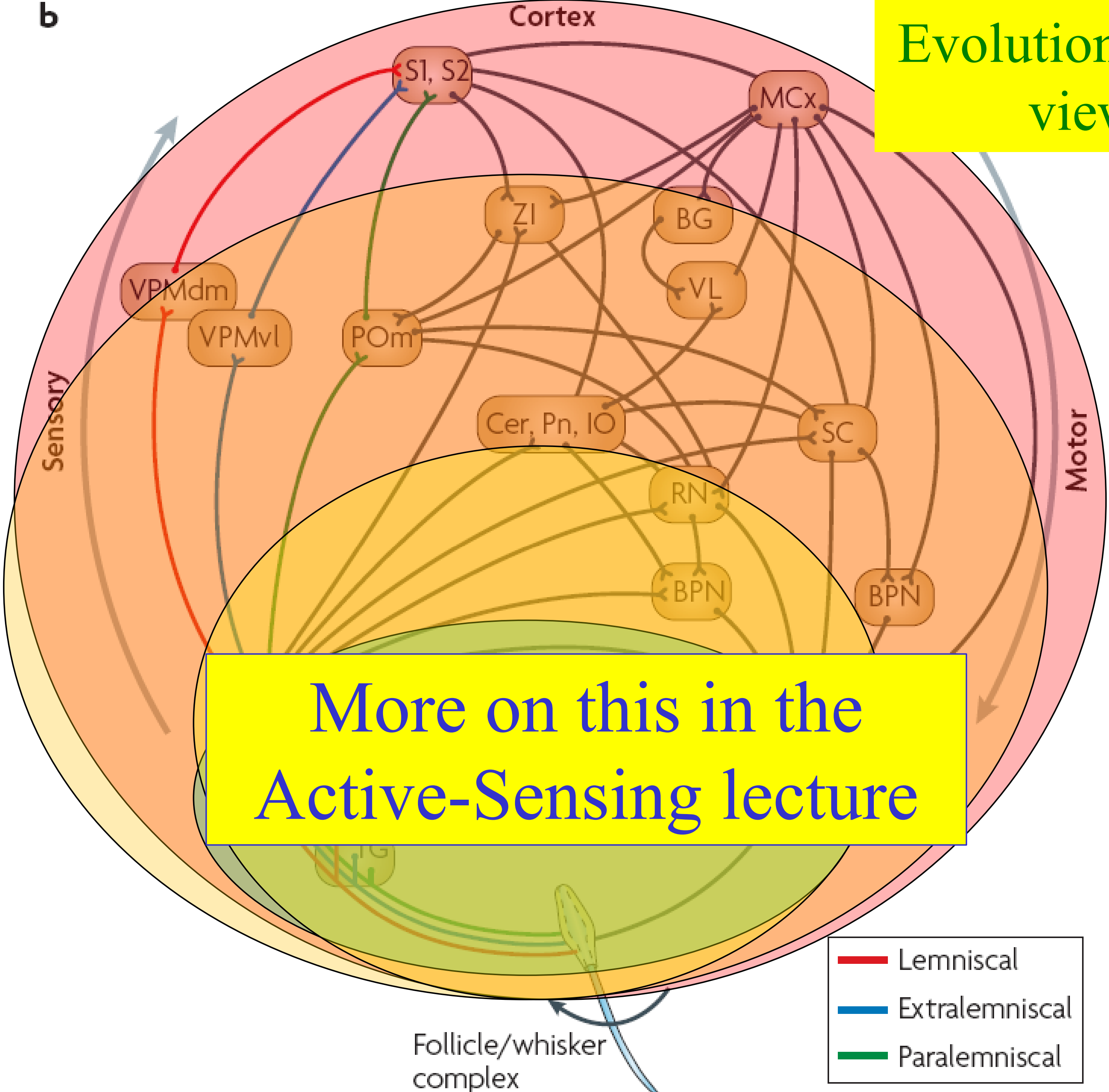



b
Cortex
S1, S2
MCx
ZI
BG
VL
VPMdm
VPMvl
POm
Cer, Pn, IO
SC
RN
BPN
BPN
TN
FN
Brainstem
TG
Sensory
Motor
Follicle/whisker complex
Lemniscal
Extralemniscal
Paralemniscal

Cortico-centric view



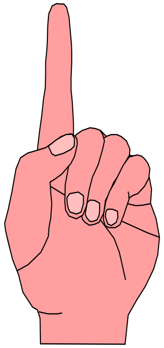
Evolution-based view

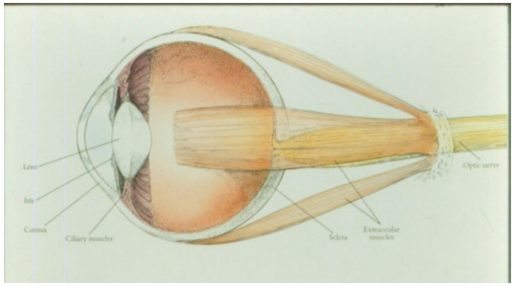


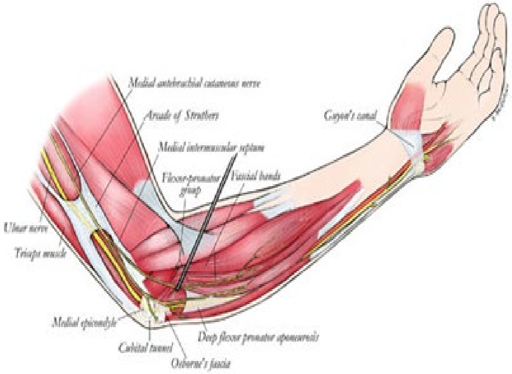
More on this in the Active-Sensing lecture

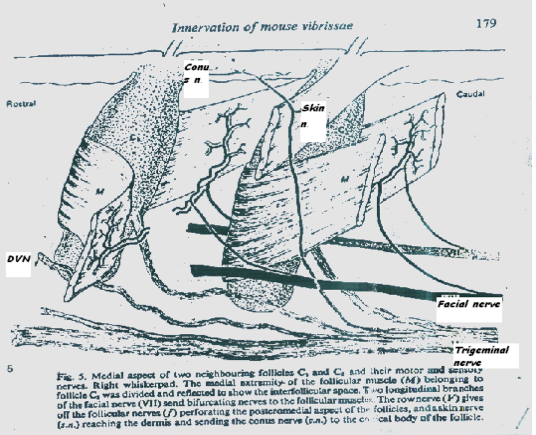
Common mechanisms of sensory processing

Rich muscular system







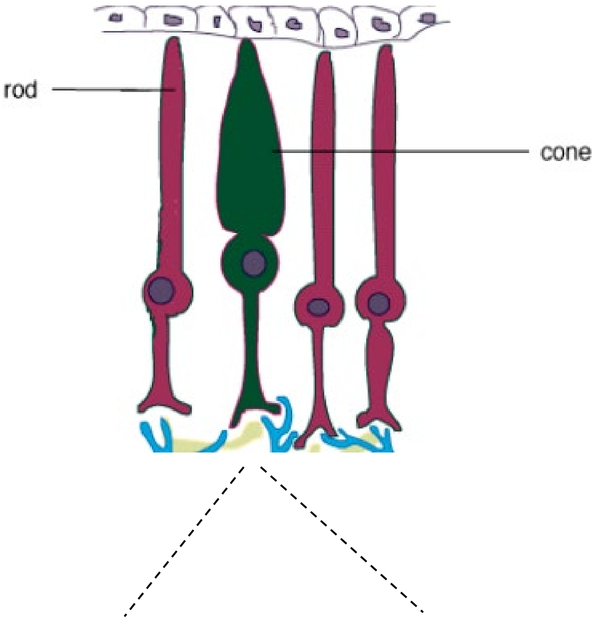


Innervation of mouse vibrissae 179

Fig. 5. Medial aspect of two neighbouring follicles C_1 and C_2 and their motor and sensory nerves. Right whiskerpad. The medial extremity of the follicular muscle (*M*) belonging to follicle C_2 was divided and reflected to show the interfollicular space. Two longitudinal branches of the facial nerve (VII) send bifurcating nerves to the follicular muscles. The row nerve (*V*) gives off the follicular nerves (*f*) perforating the posteromedial aspect of the follicles, and a skin nerve (*s.n.*) reaching the dermis and sending the conus nerve (*c.n.*) to the conical body of the follicle.

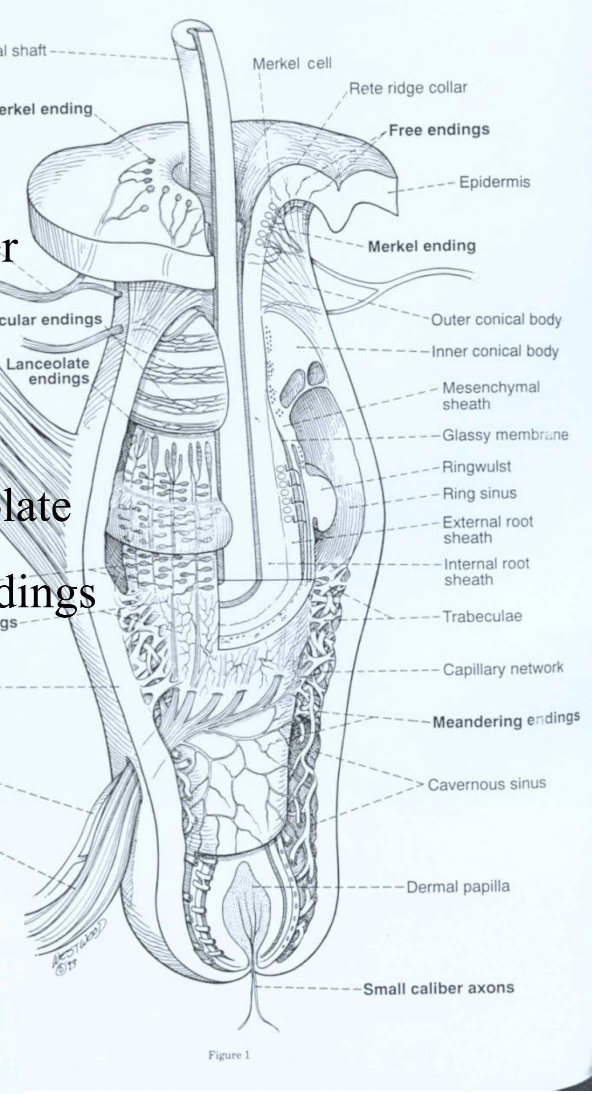
Receptor types

eye



R G B

whisker



Meisner

Merkel

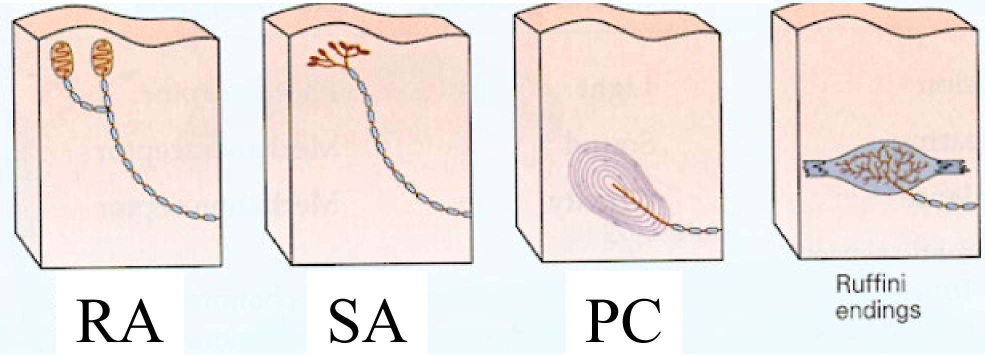
Ruffini

Lanceolate

free endings

finger

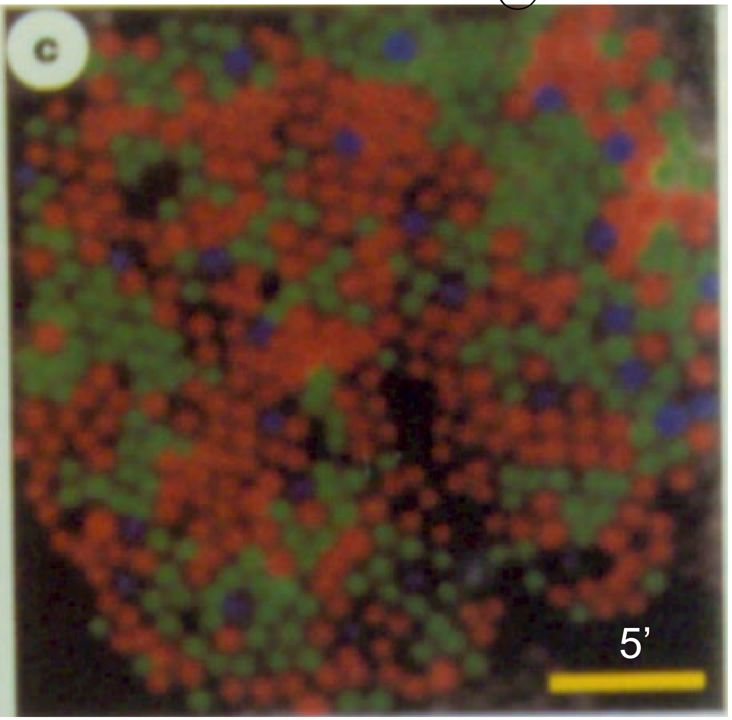
RAI SAI RAII SAII



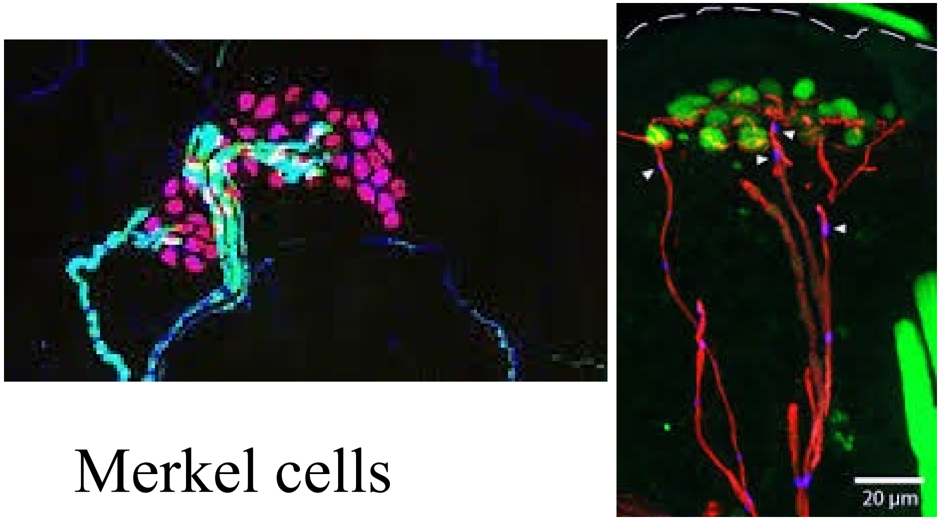
RA SA PC

Receptors mix in clusters

eye @ 1°

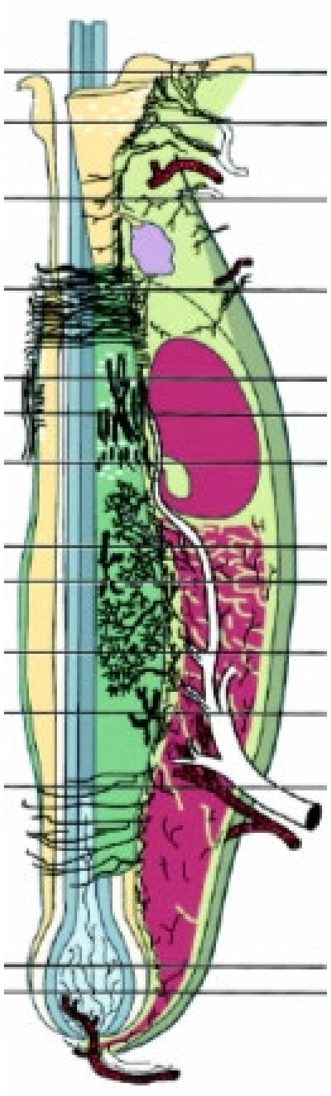


finger



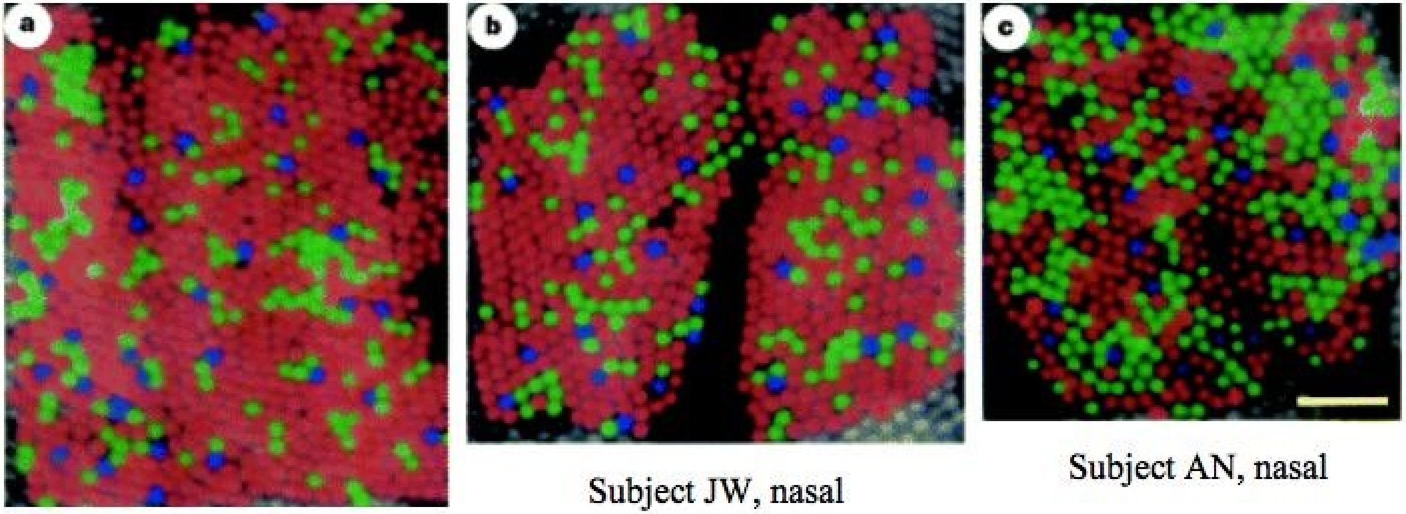
Merkel cells

whisker



<u>Idiosyncratic clustering</u>

Human cone mosaic



Subject JW, temporal

Subject JW, nasal

Subject AN, nasal

one degree eccentricity

Do they see the same world?

http://www.cns.nyu.edu/~david/courses/perception/lecturenotes/retina/retina.html

Receptor convergence / divergence

Human eye: 5M cones (+ 120M rods) --> 1M fibers

Human skin: 2,500 receptors/cm^2 --> 300 fibers / cm^2

Rat whisker: 2,000 receptors --> 300 fibers

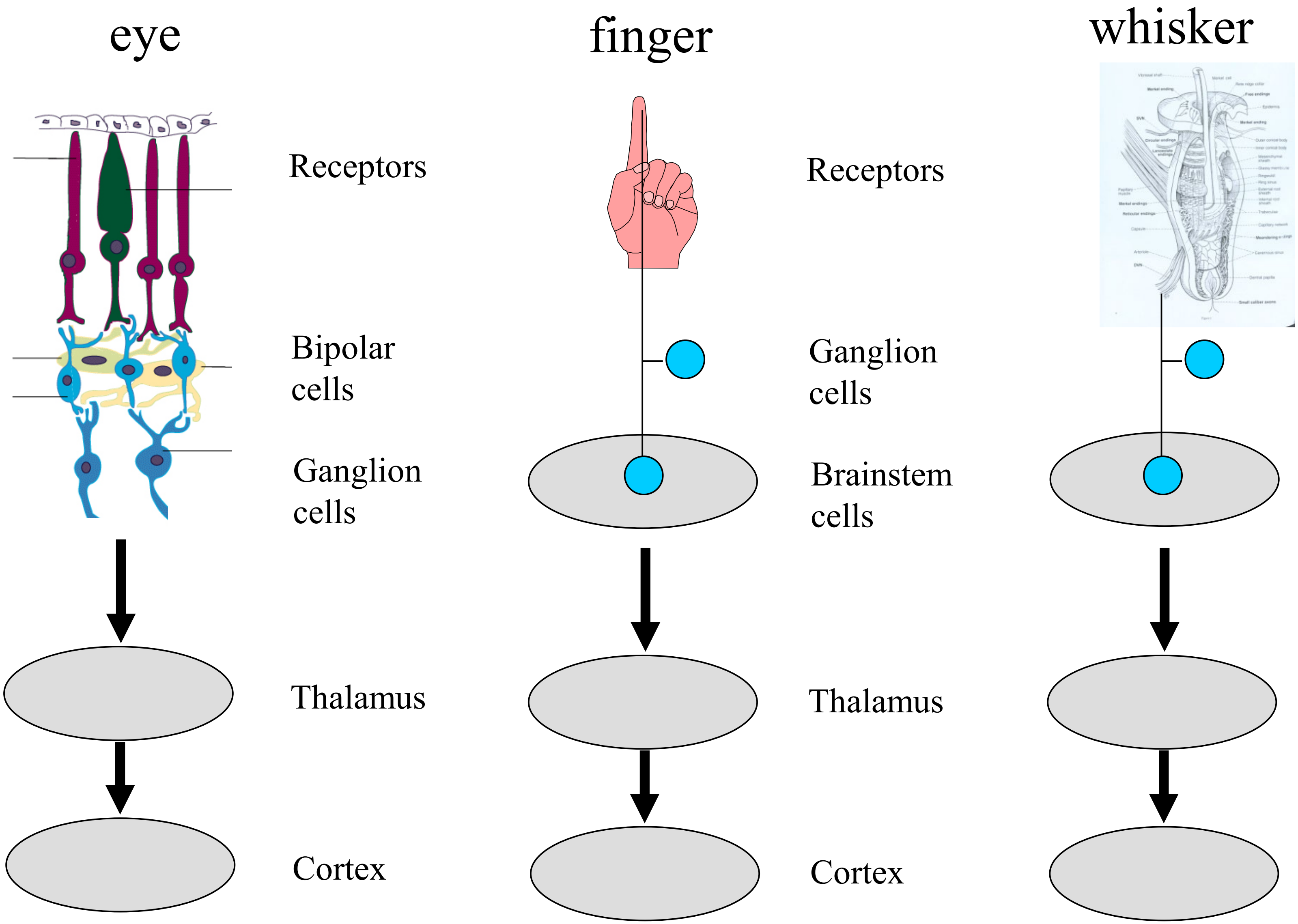
~ 10 -> 1 convergence

Human ear: 3,000 hair cells --> 30,000 fibers

~ 1 -> 10 divergence

why?
Speculate at home…

Processing stations



eye

Receptors

Bipolar cells

Ganglion cells

Thalamus

Cortex

finger

Receptors

Ganglion cells

Brainstem cells

Thalamus

Cortex

whisker

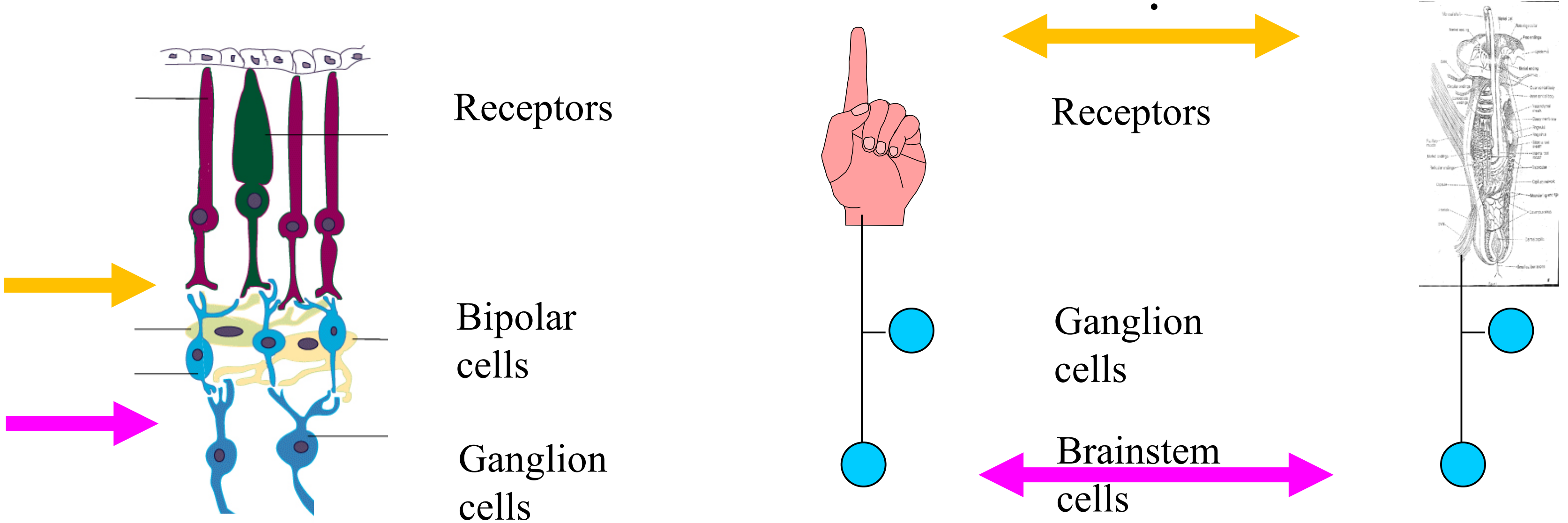
Spatial processing (by Lateral inhibition)

eye

finger

?

whisker



Receptors

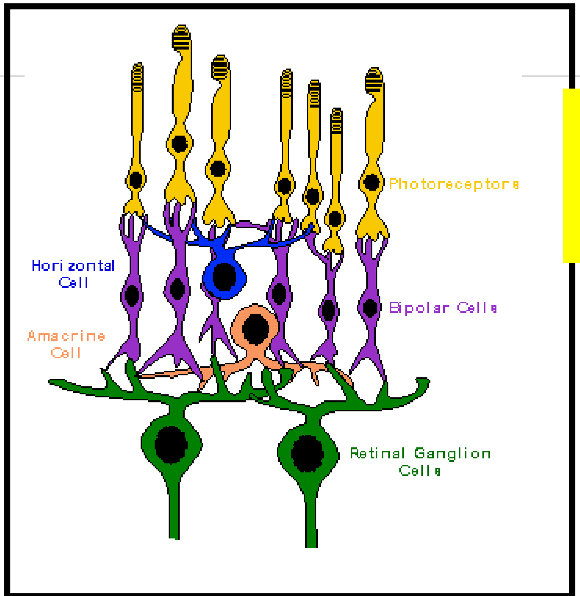
Bipolar cells

Ganglion cells

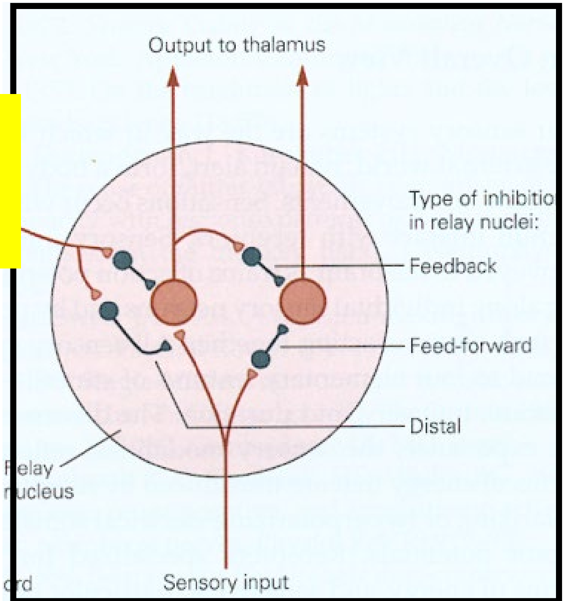
Receptors

Ganglion cells

Brainstem cells



Drive for clustering?



Efficient coding

(by coding changes only)

Changes in time:

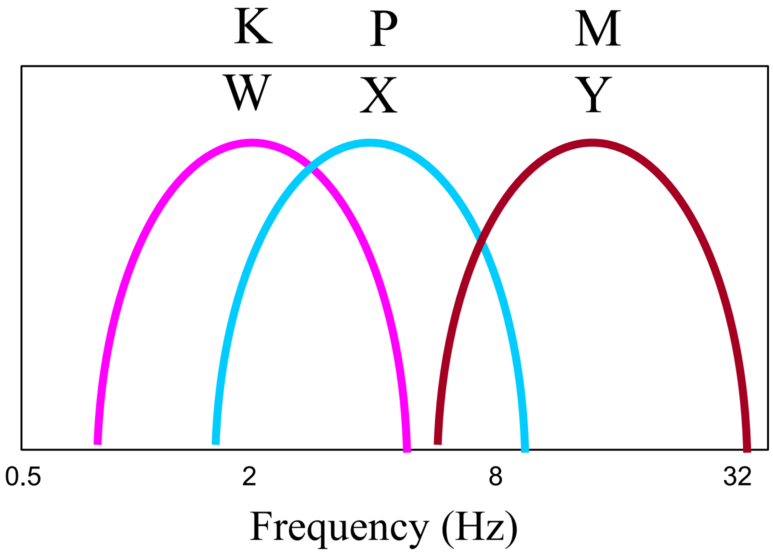
- Intrinsic in individual neurons
- Starting at the receptor level

Changes in space:

- Circuits of neurons
- Starting after lateral inhibition

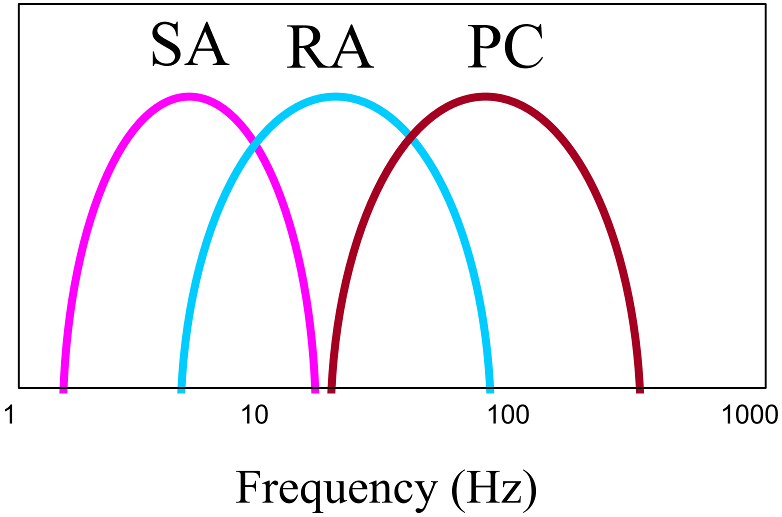
Temporal filtering (by intrinsic factors)

eye



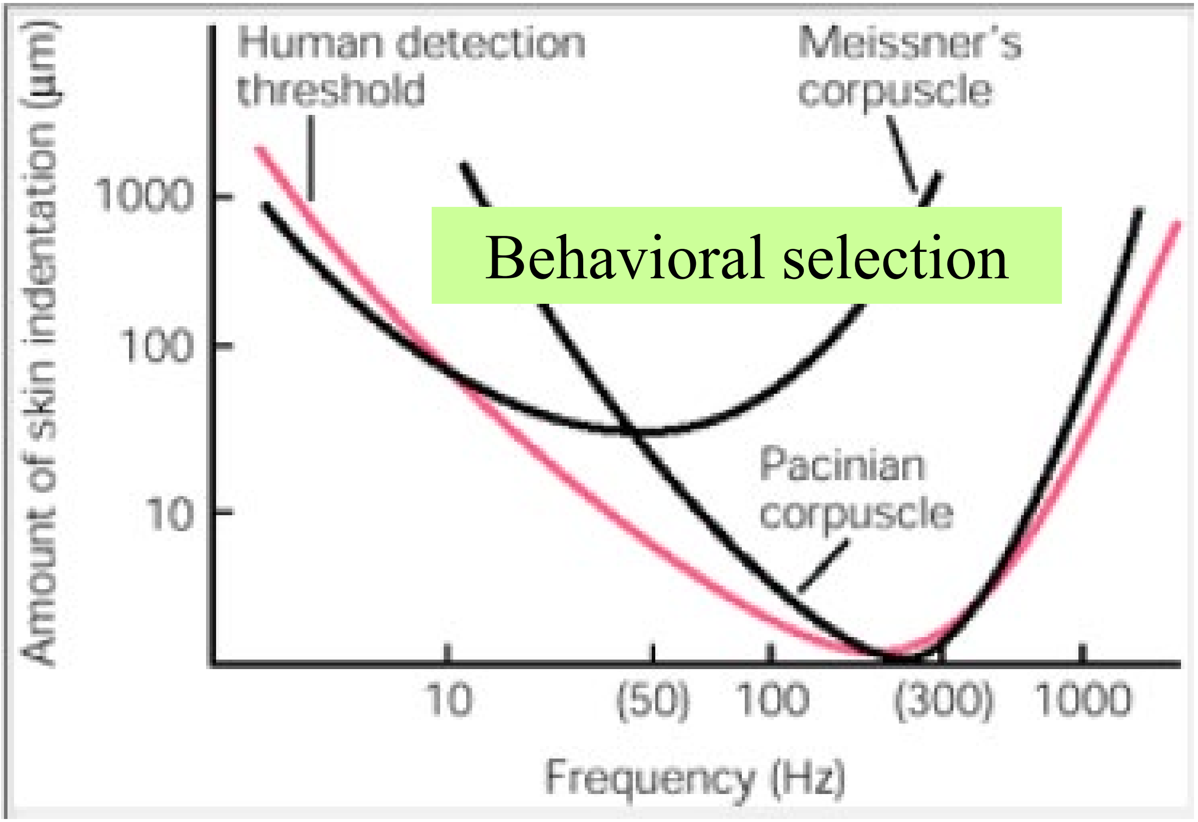
whisker

finger



Neurometric – psychometric matching

sensitivity



Behavioral selection

Figure 22-6B The threshold for detecting vibration corresponds to the tuning threshold of the mechanoreceptor. The sensitivity threshold for Meissner's corpuscles is lowest for frequencies of 20-50 Hz. Pacinian corpuscles sense higher frequencies. (Adapted from Mountcastle et al. 1972.)

- Break ?

Passive and active touch

Passive touch

- Perceptual processing follows sensory events

Active touch

- Perceptual processing surrounds sensory events:
  - The brain probes the world
  - Compares sensory data with internal expectations
  - Updates internal expectations

Active touch is done in a loop:

- Change of expectations => Probing the world
- Probing the world => Change of expectations

Passive and active touch

Passive touch	**Active touch**
▪ low thresholds	▪ higher thresholds
▪ poor accuracy	▪ high accuracy

Passive and active touch

Passive touch

- low thresholds
- poor accuracy

⇓

Detection

Active touch

- higher thresholds
- high accuracy

⇓

Exploration
Object localization
Object identification

Passive and active touch

Passive touch	**Active touch**
low thresholds	higher thresholds
poor accuracy	high accuracy

Potential underlying mechanism: “Gating”

- Arousal, preparatory, or motor commands “gate out” sensory signals
- Example: Thalamic gating (Sherman & Guillery, JNP. 1996)

Thalamic neurons have 2 modes:

- in drowsiness: hyperpolarized, bursting, low threshold
- in alertness: depolarized, single spikes, high threshold

Passive and active touch

Passive touch	**Active touch**
low thresholds	higher thresholds
poor accuracy	high accuracy

Underlying mechanisms:

- Additional information
  - expectations
  - accumulation of sensory data over time
  - more coding dimensions
  - increased resolution due to scanning
- close-loop operation

Passive and active touch

Passive touch	**Active touch**
low thresholds	higher thresholds
poor accuracy	high accuracy

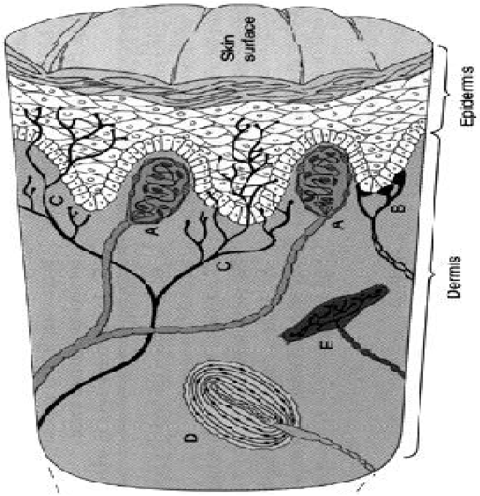
Underlying active mechanisms:

- Additional information
  - expectations
  - accumulation of sensory data over time
  - more coding dimensions
  - increased resolution due to scanning
- close-loop operation

Sensory encoding: *What receptors tell the brain*

Sensory organs consist of **receptor arrays**:

somatosensation **audition** **vision**

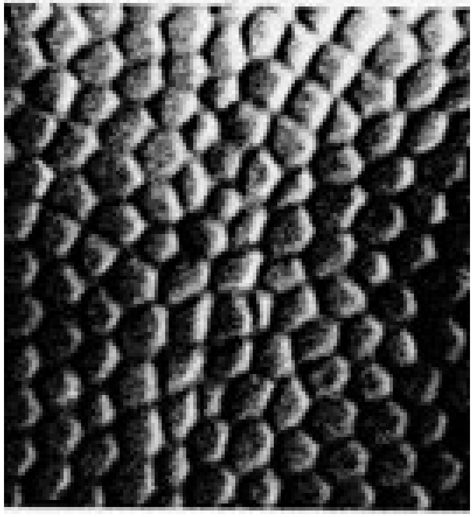


~200 µm

Finger pad

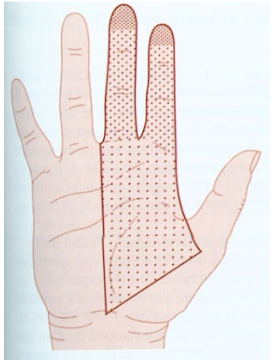
10 µm

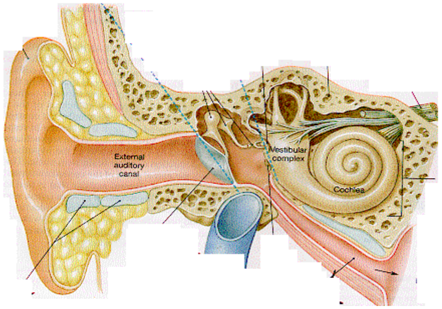
cochlea

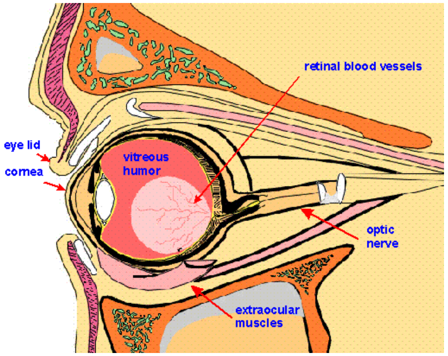


10 µm

retina



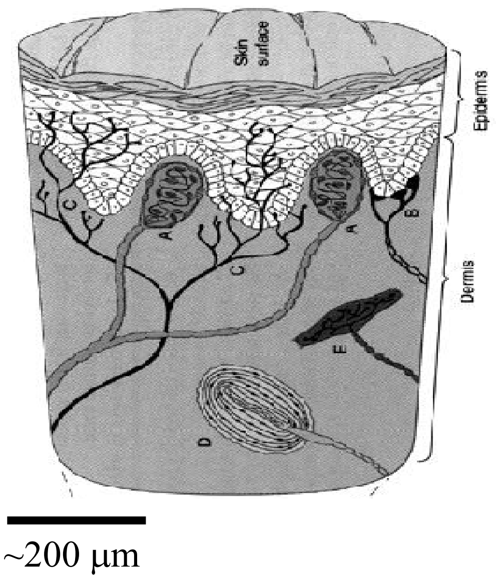




Sensory encoding: *What receptors tell the brain*

Sensory organs consist of **receptor arrays**:

somatosensation

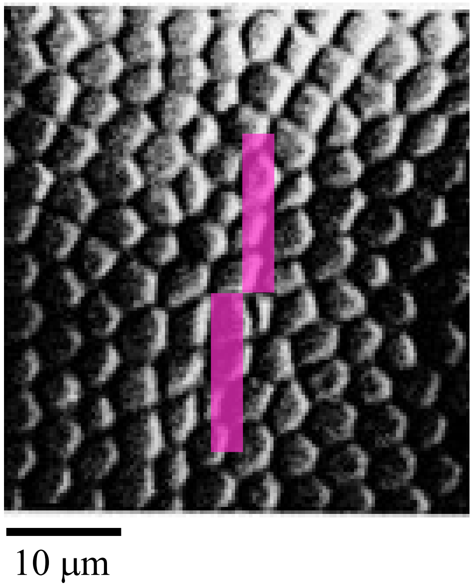


Finger pad

audition

cochlea

vision



retina

Spatial organization => Spatial coding (“*which* receptors are activated”)

Spatial coding metaphors

one could think of:

the ***eye*** *as a* ***camera***

the ***skin*** *as a* ***carbon paper***

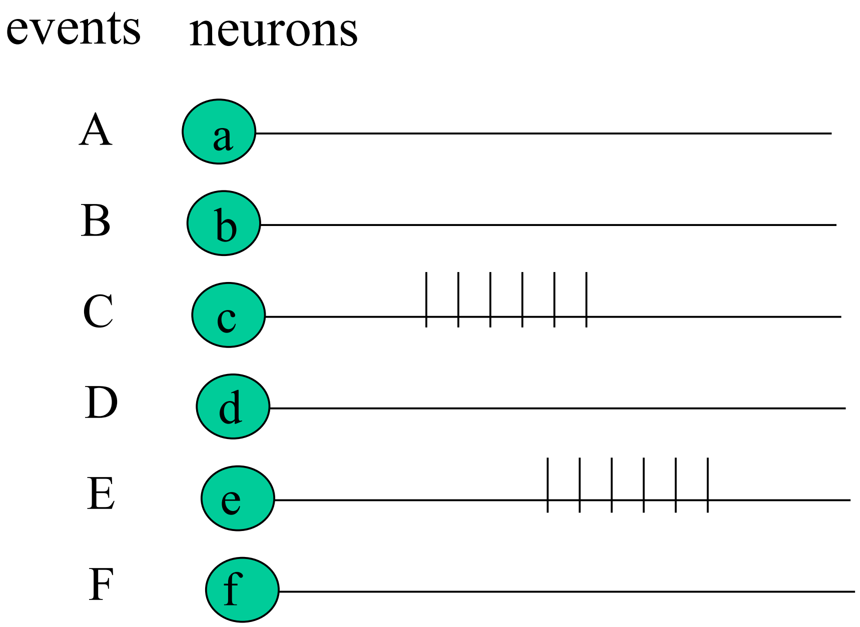
light is

Imprinted on the retina via photo-receptors

How neurons encode external events in space?

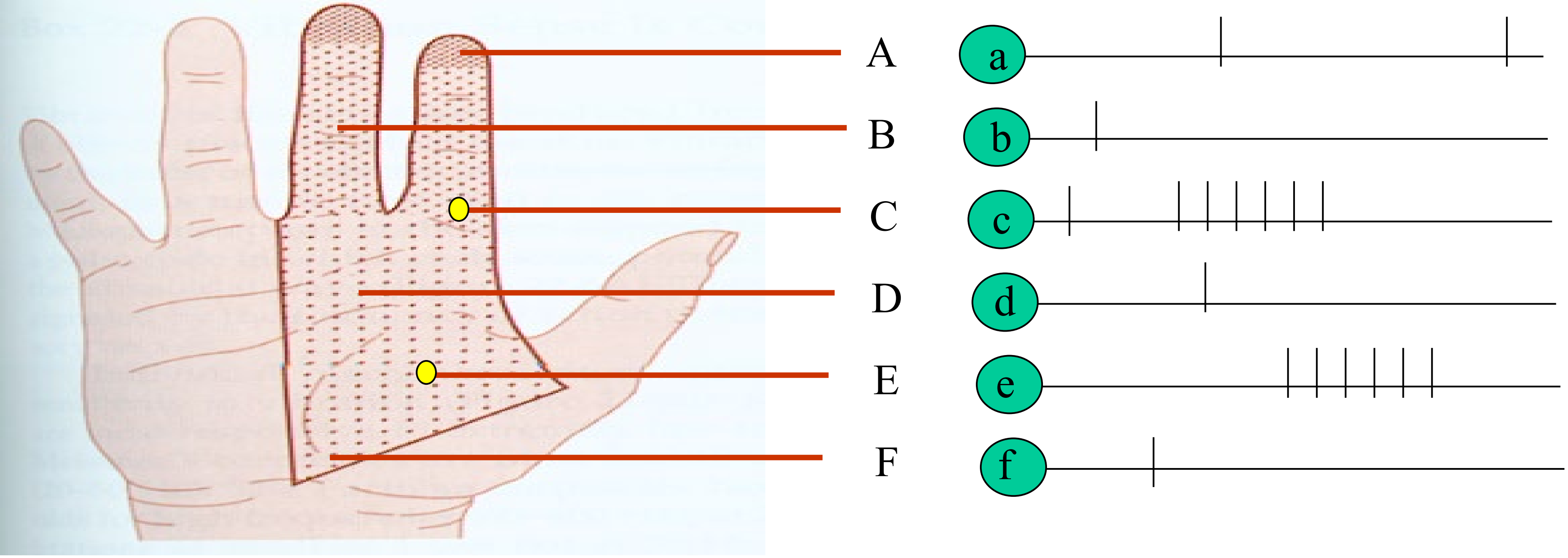
The “labeled-line code”.

a binary code, reporting yes/no **about the occurrence of a given event.**



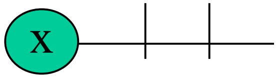
Every neuron has a “label”

Reading out the labeled line code



reading algorithm: a location X is pressed if and only if neuron x fires

On what condition will this algorithm be valid?

(X) ● ~~<~~=> 

Neuron x fires *if ~~and only~~ if* X is pressed

Is this assumption valid?

1. The problem of background activity

2. The “problem” of sensor movements

receptors are sensitive to <u>changes</u>

Thus

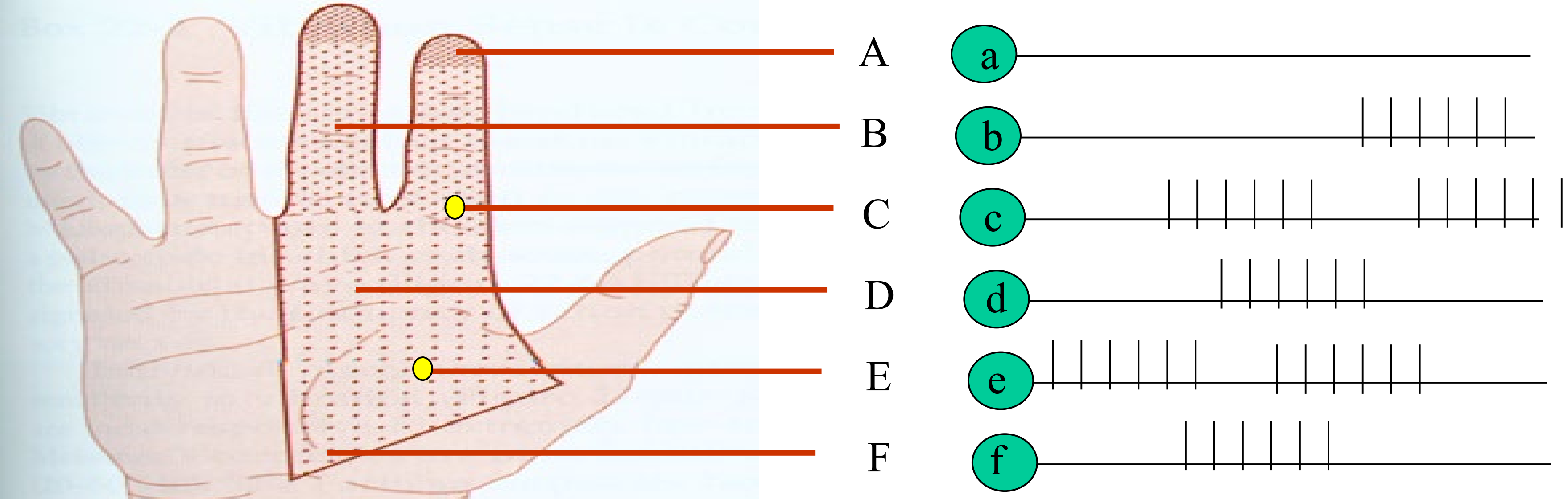
If both objects and sensors are passive (stationary), nothing will be sensed

Thus

Sensors must move in order to sense stationary objects

How sensor motion constrains sensory coding?

Reading out the labeled line code



reading algorithm: a location X is pressed if and only if neuron x fires

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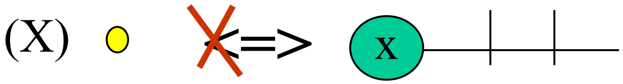


Neuron x fires *if ~~and only~~ if* X is pressed

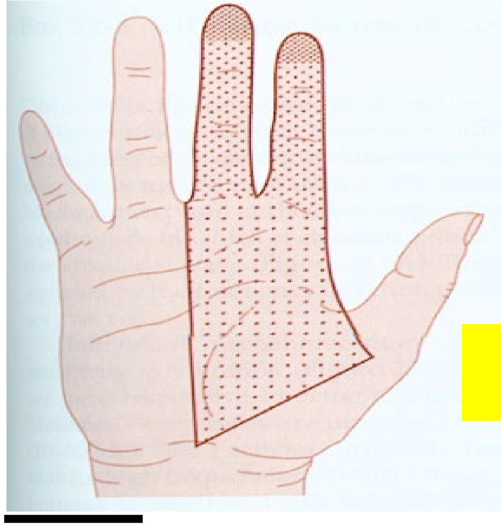
Is this assumption valid?

2. The "problem" of sensor motion

sensory encoding: *What receptors tell the brain*

Sensory organs consist of **receptor arrays**:

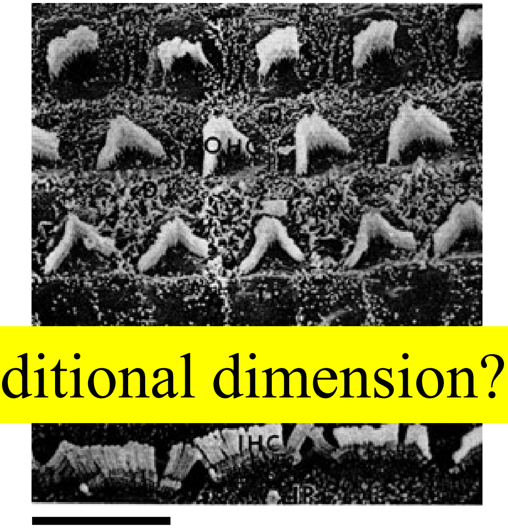
somatosensation



~50 µm

Finger pad

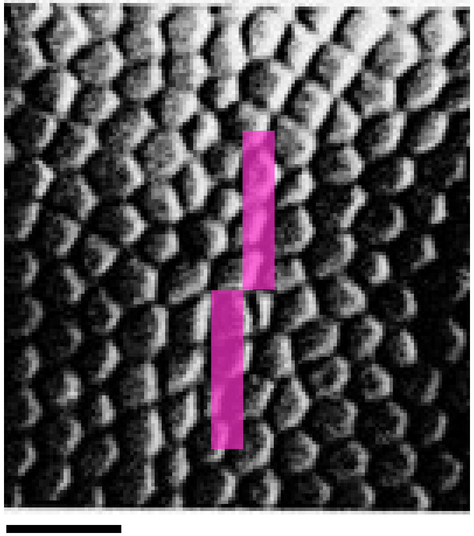
audition



10 µm

cochlea

vision



10 µm

retina

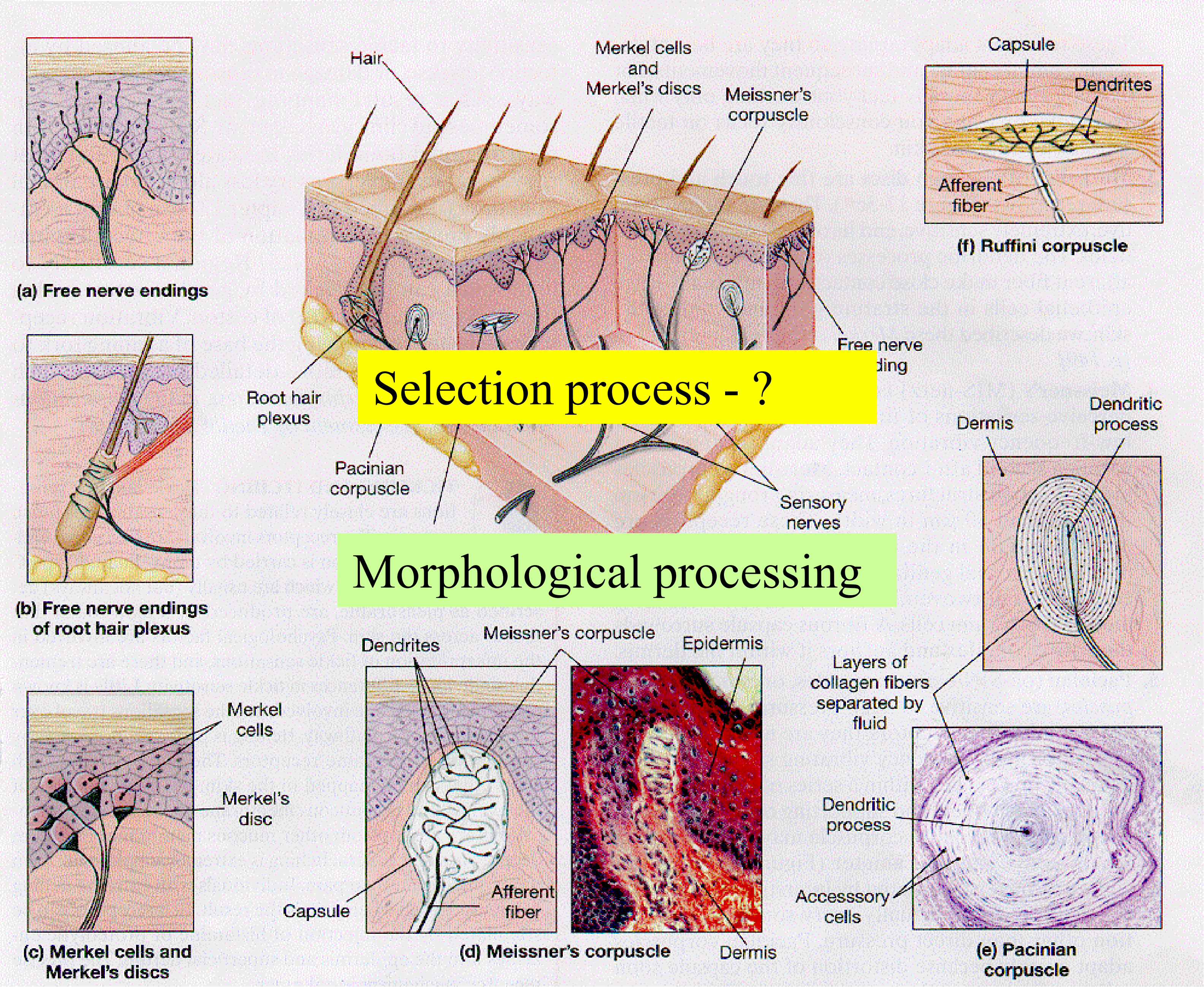
Additional dimension?

Spatial organization => Spatial coding (“*which* receptors are activated”)

Movements => Temporal coding (“*when* are receptors activated”)

Receptors

Evolutionary specialization



(a) Free nerve endings

(b) Free nerve endings of root hair plexus

(c) Merkel cells and Merkel's discs

(d) Meissner's corpuscle

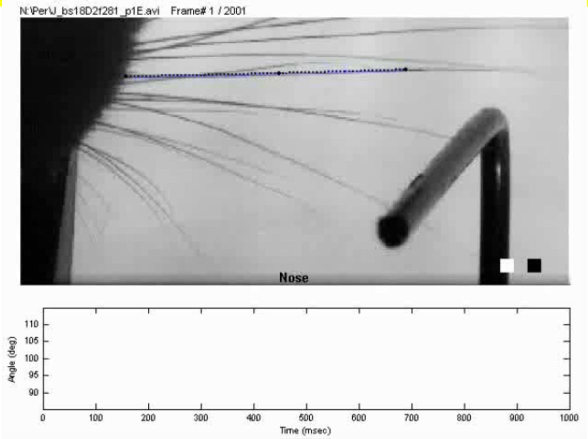
(e) Pacinian corpuscle

(f) Ruffini corpuscle

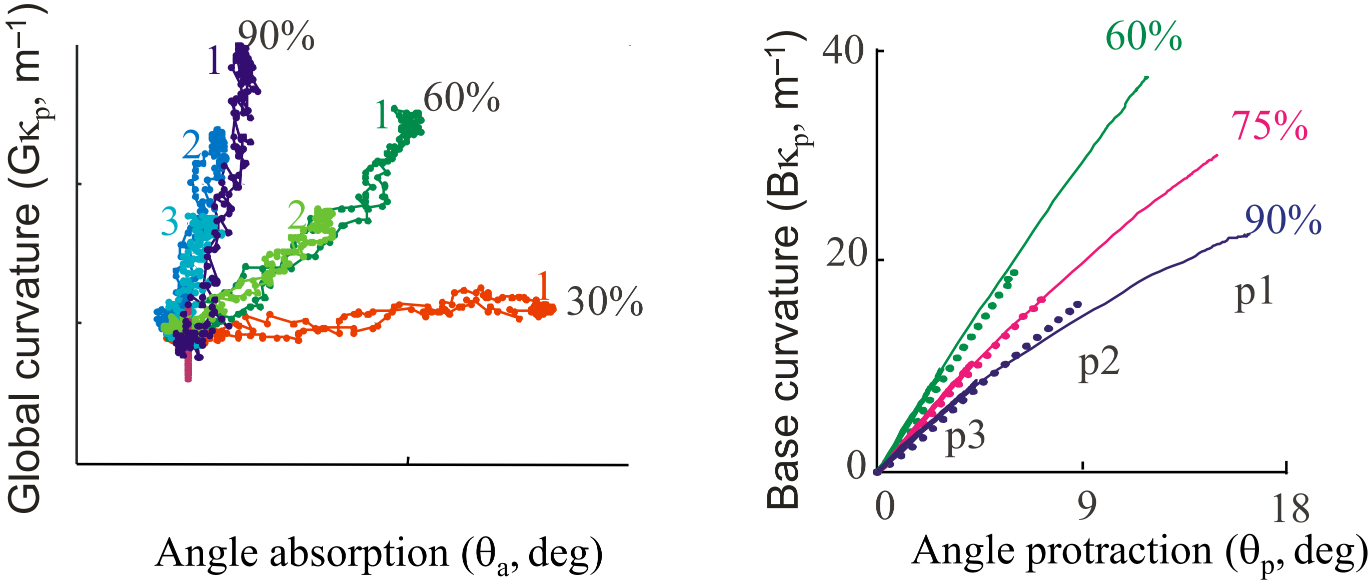
Selection process - ?

Morphological processing

Morphological processing



Morphological phase plane

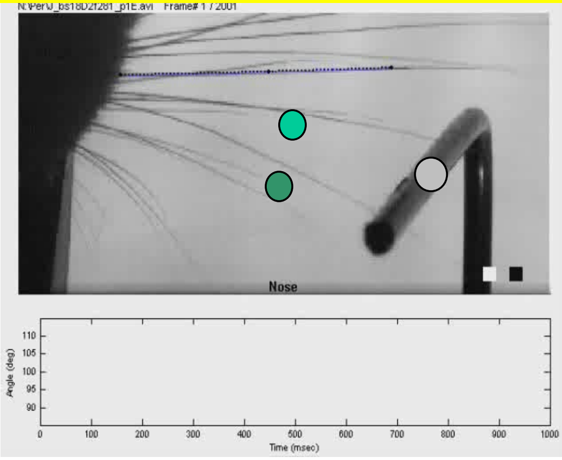


$G\kappa$ - θ_a phase plane

$B\kappa$ - θ_p phase plane

Bagdasarian et al. *Nat Neurosci* (2013)

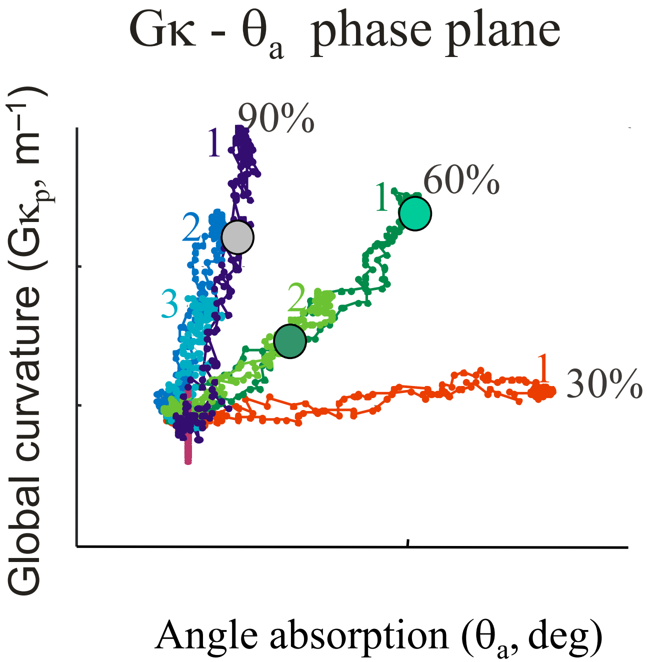
Morphological processing

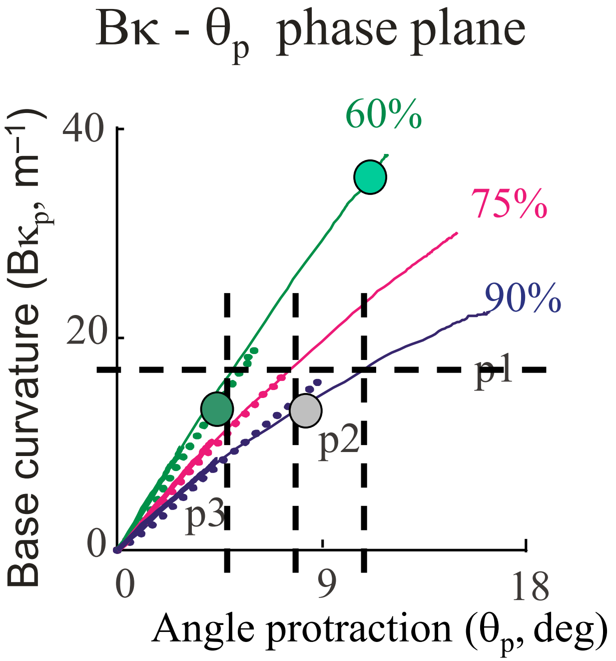


Motor-sensory phase plane

Morphological phase plane

Sensory


Gκ - θ_a phase plane

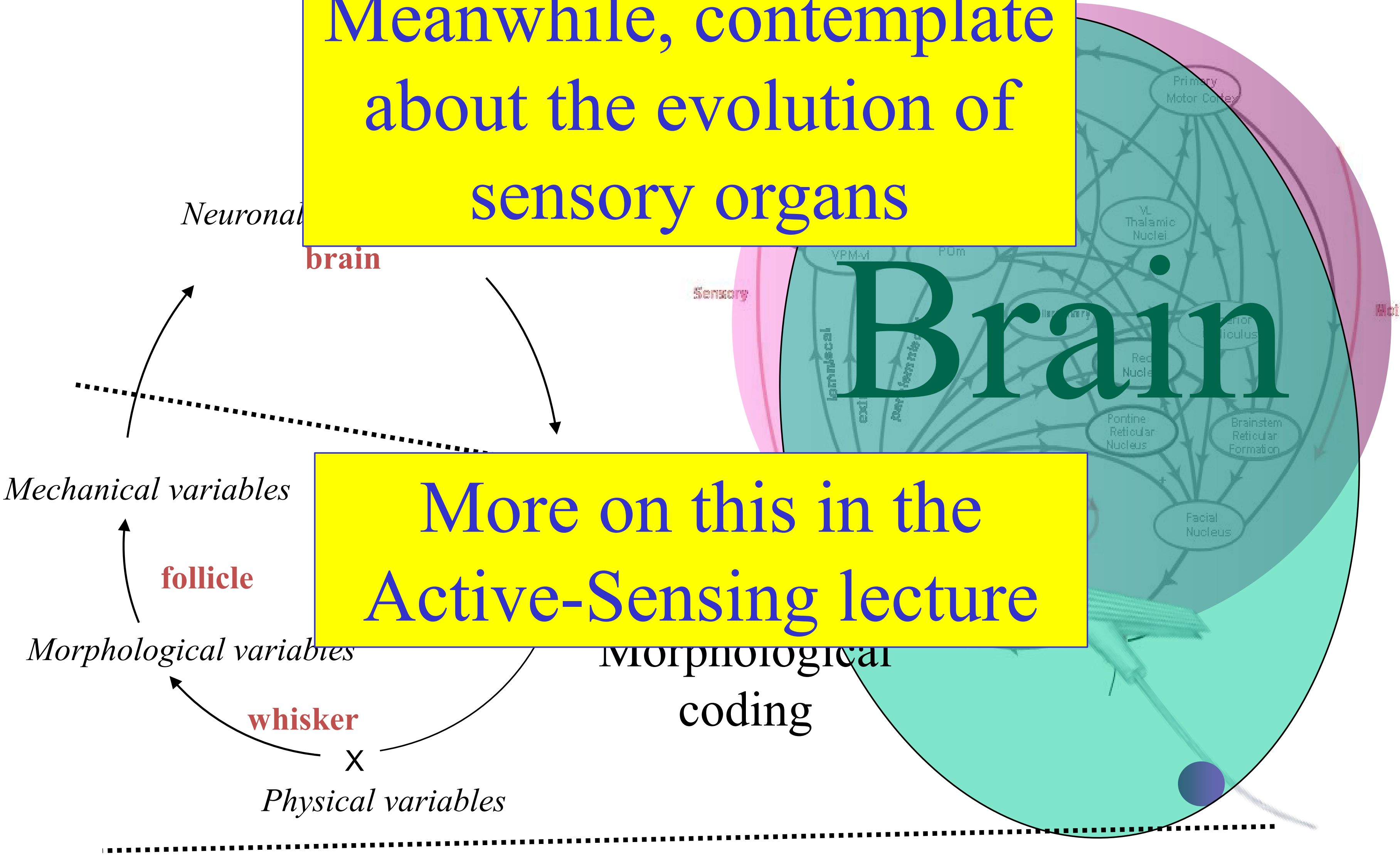

Bκ - θ_p phase plane

Motor

Bagdasarian et al. *Nat Neurosci* (2013)

Organism-environment attractors

Meanwhile, contemplate about the evolution of sensory organs

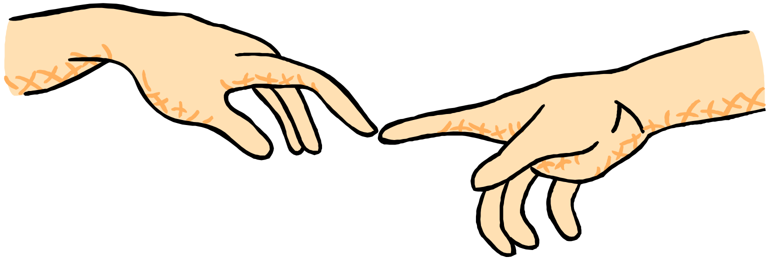


More on this in the Active-Sensing lecture

Touching

- Body-world interface
- Mechanisms of sensory processing (across senses)
- Motor-sensory coupling
- Passive vs active touch
- Neuronal coding
- Morphological coding

Touching



The End