PHGY 212 - Physiology

SENSORY PHYSIOLOGY
Sensory Receptors

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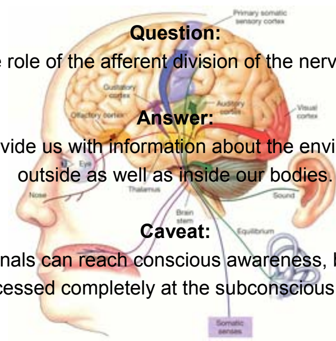
Sensory Systems



Question:
What is the role of the afferent division of the nervous system?

Answer:
To provide us with information about the environment outside as well as inside our bodies.

Caveat:
Sensory signals can reach conscious awareness, but others are processed completely at the subconscious level.

Sensory Systems

Conscious

Special senses
Vision
Hearing
Taste
Smell
Equilibrium

Somatic senses
Touch/pressure
Temperature
Pain
Proprioception

Subconscious

Somatic stimuli
Muscle length and tension

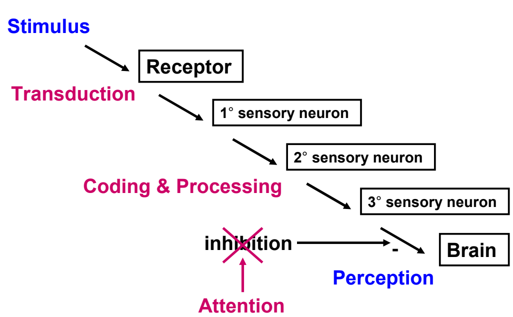
Visceral stimuli
Blood pressure
pH/oxygen content in blood
pH of cerebrospinal fluid
Lung inflation
Osmolarity of body fluids
Blood glucose

Sensory Systems

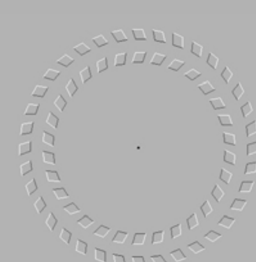
All sensory pathways begin with a stimulus,
which acts on sensory receptors,
which convert the stimulus in neural signals,
which are transmitted by sensory neurons to the brain,
where they are integrated.

Question:
How are sensory signals transduced, coded, and processed?

From Stimulus to Perception



From Stimulus to Perception



From Stimulus to Perception

Sensory Receptors

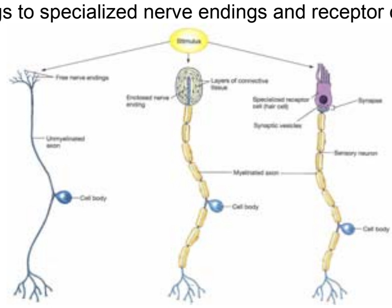
Sensory receptors are divided into five major groups:

Chemoreceptors	*pH, O_2, organic molecules*
Mechanoreceptors	*vibration, acceleration, sound*
Photoreceptors	*light*
Thermoreceptors	*temperature*
Nocireceptors	*tissue damage (pain)*

The specificity of a sensory receptor for a particular type of stimulus is called **the law of specific nerve energies**.

Sensory Receptors

The complexity of sensory receptors ranges from free nerve endings to specialized nerve endings and receptor cells.



Sensory Transduction

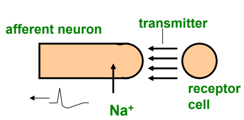
Question:
How is a stimulus converted into a neural signal?

Answer:
The stimulus opens ion channels in the receptor membrane, either directly or indirectly (through a second messenger).

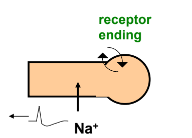
In most cases, channel opening results in net influx of Na^+ into the receptor, causing a **depolarization** of the membrane.
In a few cases, the response to the stimulus is hyperpolarization when Na^+ channels are closed and K^+ leaves the cell.

Sensory Transduction

Sensory transduction converts stimuli into graded potentials. Such changes in receptor membrane potential are known as the **receptor potential** and the **generator potential**.



special sense receptors



somatic sense receptors

Sensory Representations

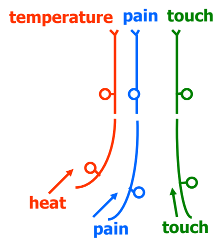
To create an accurate neural representation of sensory stimuli, the brain must distinguish FOUR stimulus properties:

1) stimulus **modality**
2) stimulus **location**
3) stimulus **intensity**
4) stimulus **duration**

Stimulus Modality

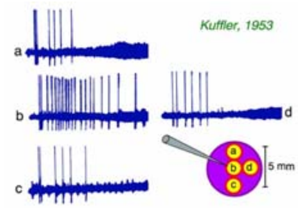
Each receptor type is most sensitive to a particular type of stimulus. The brain thus associates a signal coming from a specific group of receptors with a specific modality.

This direct association between a receptor and a sensation is called the **labeled line coding**.



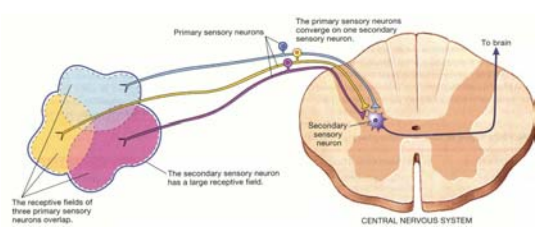
Stimulus Location

Each sensory receptor is most sensitive to stimulation of a specific area, which defines the receptor's **receptive field**. When action potentials are elicited from a sensory neuron, the neuron's receptive field codes the stimulus location.



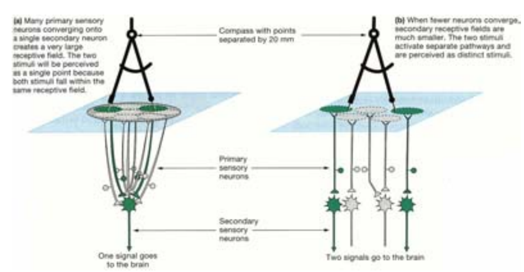
Stimulus Location

Sensory receptive fields vary in size and frequently overlap. **Convergence of inputs** onto a single sensory neuron enhances that neuron's sensitivity, but reduces its spatial resolution.



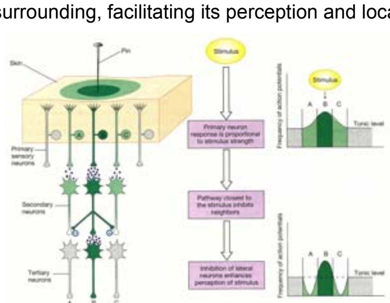
Stimulus Location

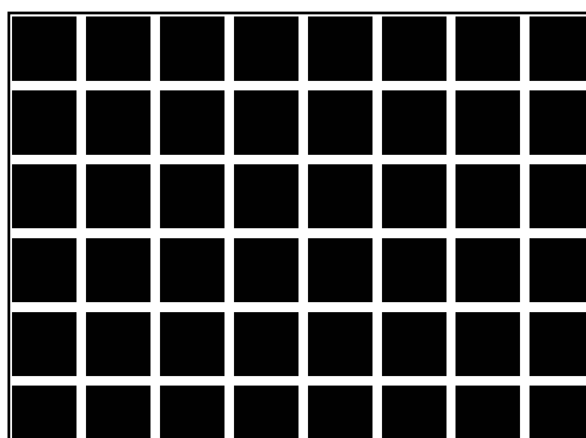
The size of neuronal receptive fields representing a given area determines our capacity to **discriminate** stimuli in this area.



Stimulus Location

Lateral inhibition enhances the contrast between the stimulus and its surrounding, facilitating its perception and localization.

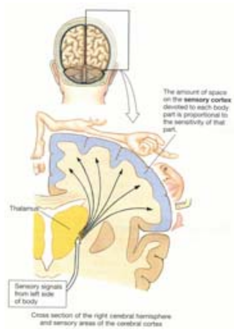




Stimulus Location

Sensory neuronal receptive fields are orderly organized in cortical sensory areas to form **topographical maps**.

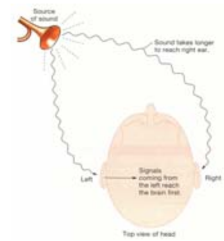
The location of a stimulus is coded according to which group of neurons is active.



Stimulus Location

Auditory and olfactory information is the exception to the topographical localization rule.

For these sensory modalities, the brain uses the **timing difference** in receptor activation to compute the source location of sounds or odors.

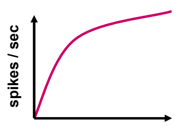


Stimulus Intensity

Stimulus intensity is coded by:

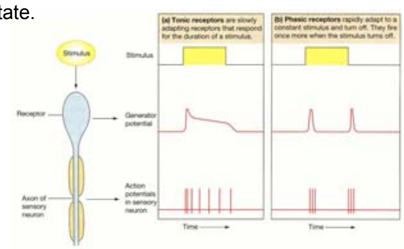
1) the number of receptors activated (**population coding**), from low-threshold receptors to high-threshold ones.

2) the frequency of action potentials (**frequency coding**), following not a linear but a power relationship.



Stimulus Duration

Stimulus duration can be coded by the spike train duration, but not all sensory receptors can sustain their responses. The neural code best reflects the **change in stimulation**, not the steady state.



Reading

Silverthorn (2nd edition)
pages 282 - 289

Silverthorn (1st edition)
Page 263 - 271