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# **PATHOPHYSIOLOGY**

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# Overview

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# What is pain?

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*An unpleasant sensory and emotional experience associated with actual or potential tissue damage, or described in terms of such damage.*

International Association for the Study of Pain (IASP) 2011

# Pain Is the 5<sup>th</sup> Vital Sign



Respiration



Pulse



Blood pressure



Temperature



Pain

# Overview of Pain



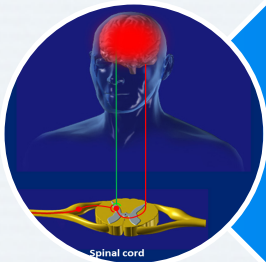
## Protective role: vital early warning system

- Senses noxious stimuli
- Triggers withdrawal reflex and heightens sensitivity after tissue damage to reduce risk of further damage



## Unpleasant experience:

- Suffering – physical, emotional and cognitive dimensions
- Continuous unrelieved pain can affect physical (e.g., cardiovascular, renal, gastrointestinal systems, etc.) and psychological states

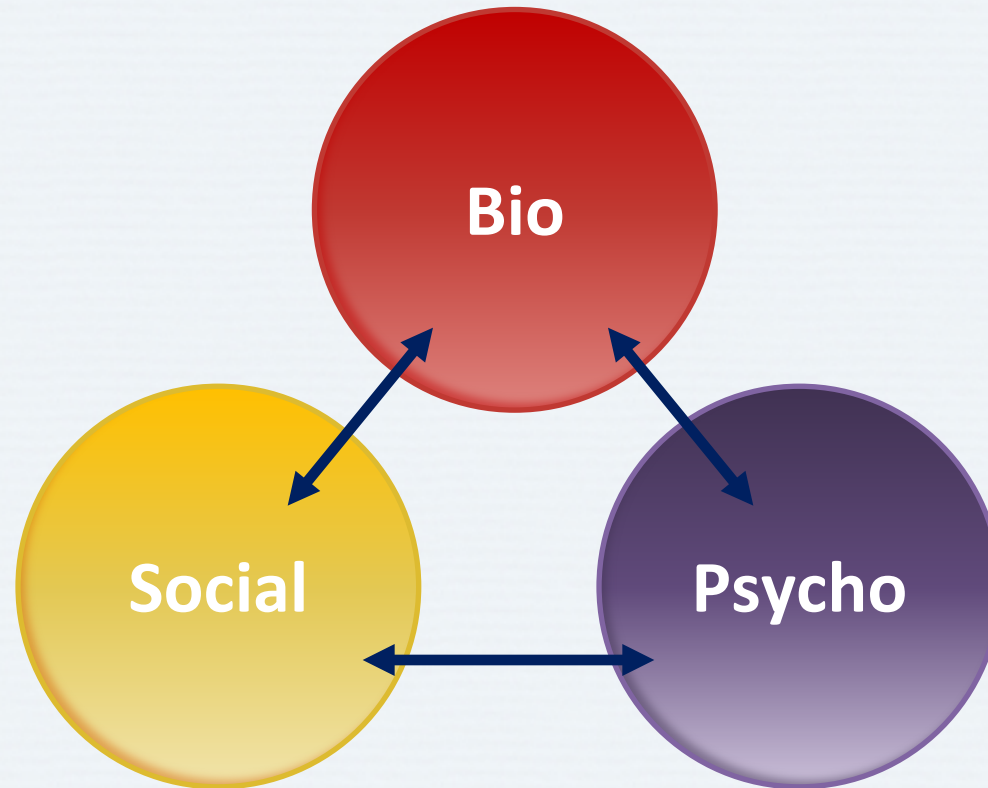


## Maladaptive response:

- Neuropathic and central sensitization/dysfunctional pain
- Not protective
- Lessens quality of life

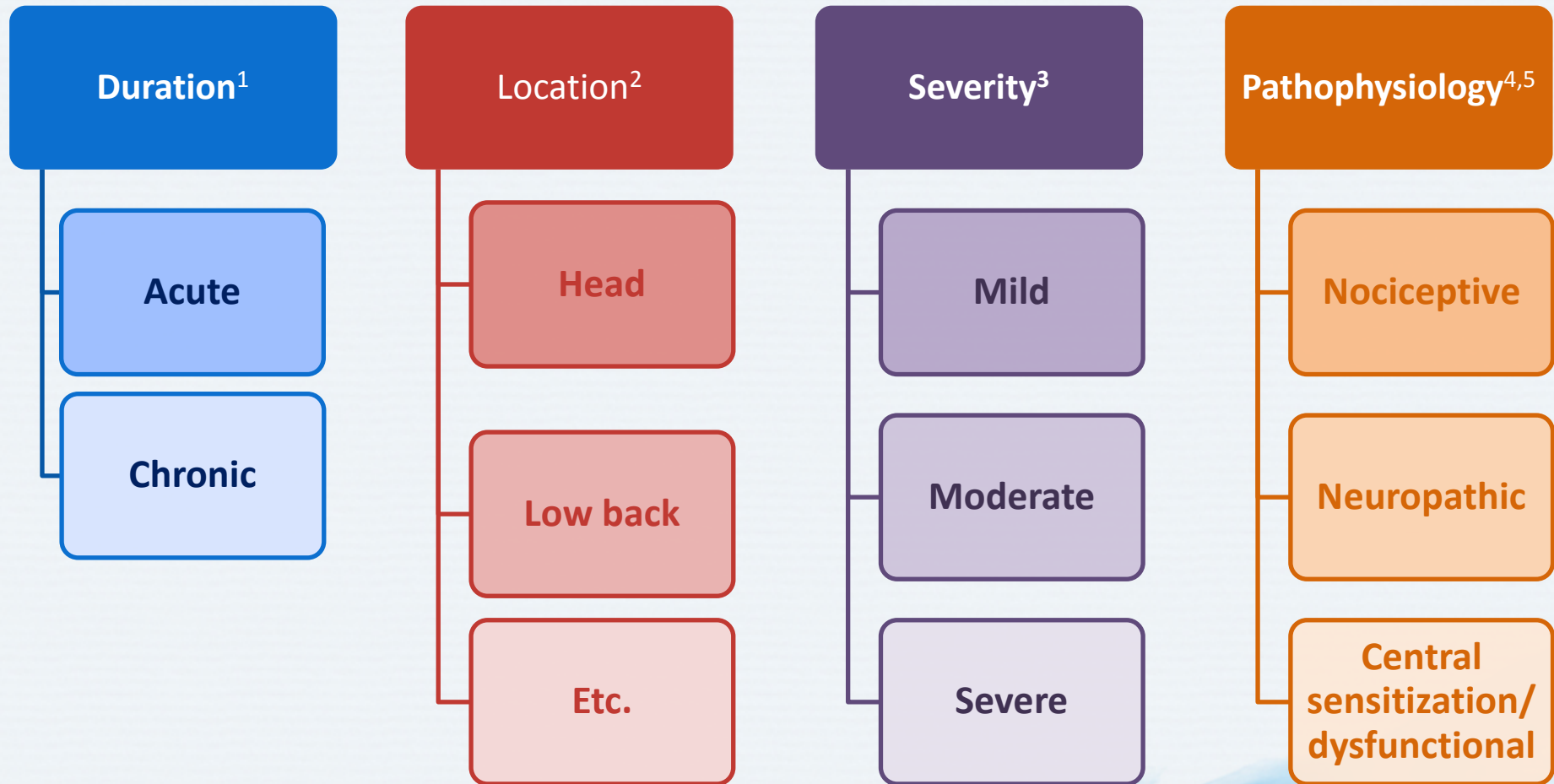
# Biopsychosocial Model of Pain

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# Pain Classification



1. McMahon SB, Koltzenburg M. In: McMahon SB, Koltzenburg M (eds). *Wall and Melzack's Textbook of Pain*. 5th ed. Elsevier; London, UK: 2006;

2. Loeser D et al (eds). *Bonica's Management of Pain*. 3rd ed. Lippincott Williams & Wilkins; Hagerstown, MD: 2001;

3. Hanley MA et al. *J Pain* 2006; 7(2):129-33; 4. Jensen TS et al. *Pain* 2011; 152(10):2204-5; 5. Woolf CJ. *Pain* 2011; 152(3 Suppl):S2-15.

# The Pain Continuum

Insult

*Time to resolution*

Acute pain

Chronic pain

*Normal, time-limited response  
to 'noxious' experience  
(less than 3 months)*

- Usually obvious tissue damage
- Serves a protective function
- Pain resolves upon healing

*Pain that has persisted beyond  
normal tissue healing time  
(usually more than 3 months)*

- Usually has no protective function
- Degrades health and function

Acute pain may become chronic



# Acute vs. Chronic Pain

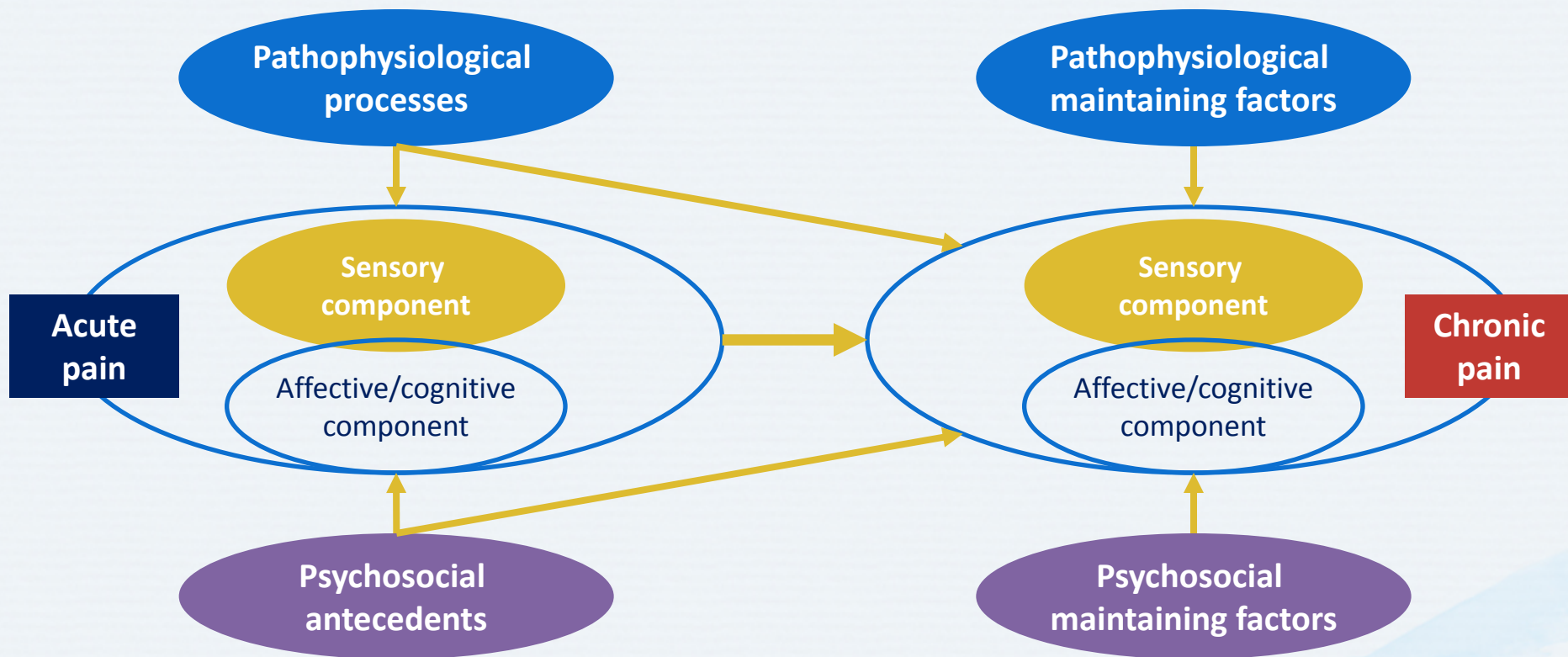
## Acute

- Sudden, sharp, intense, localized
- Usually self-limited (<6 months)
- May be associated with physiologic changes (e.g., sweating, increased heart rate, elevated blood pressure)

## Chronic

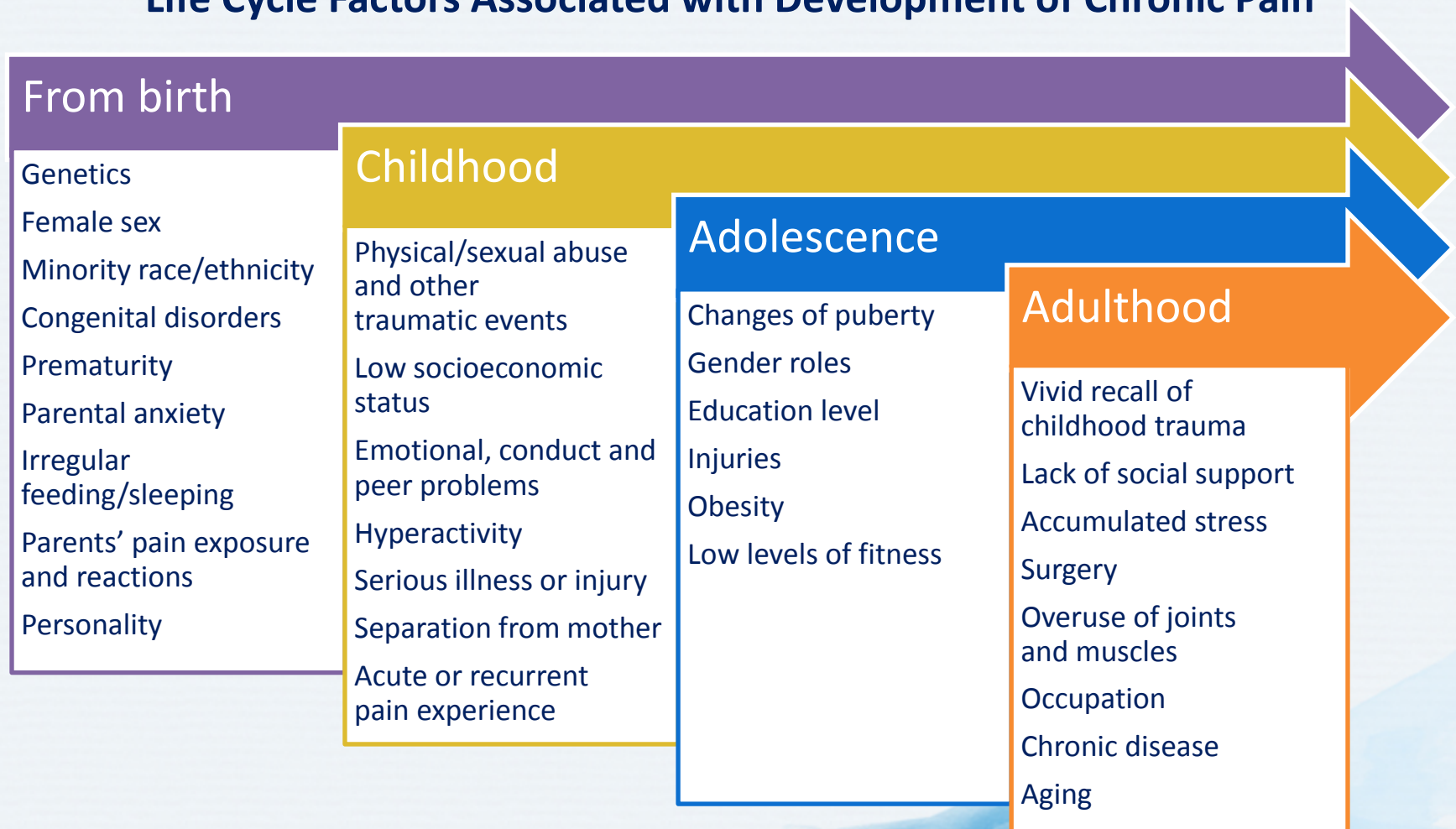
- Gnawing, aching, diffuse
- No definite beginning or end
- Varies in intensity; may remit briefly
- Associated with psychological and social difficulties
- Acute pain may be superimposed

# Acute Pain Can Become Chronic



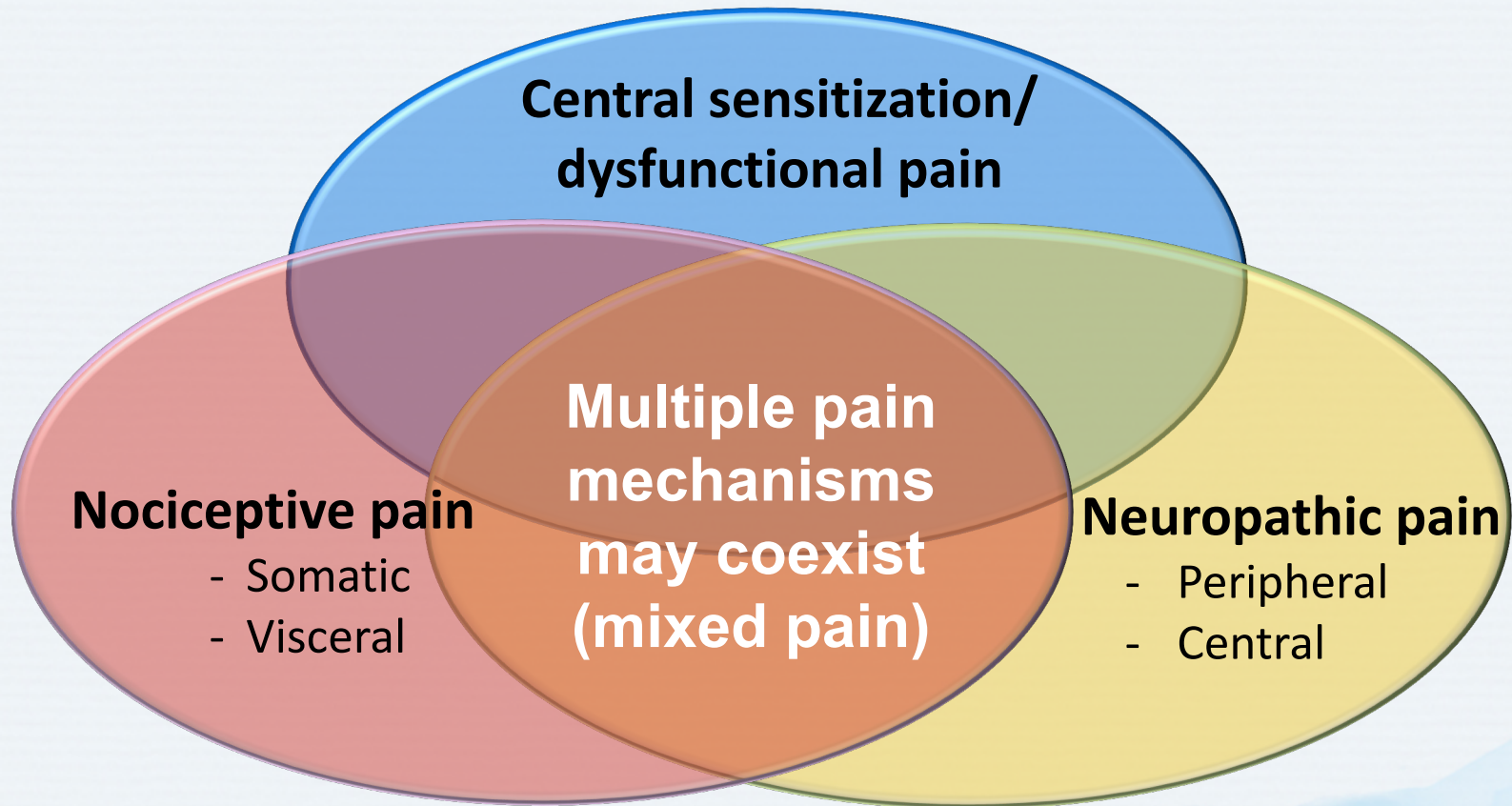
# Acute Pain Can Become Chronic

## Life Cycle Factors Associated with Development of Chronic Pain

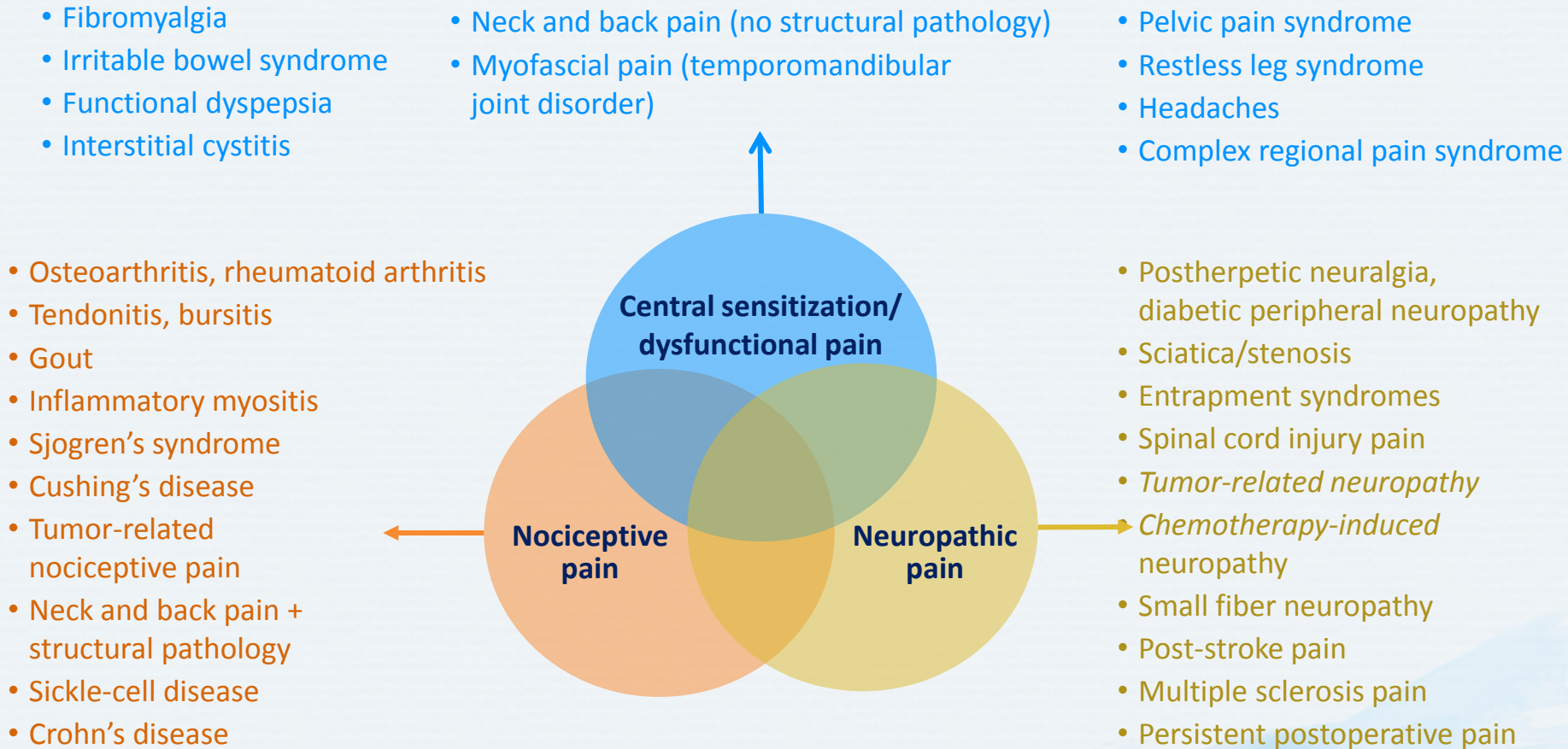


# Pathophysiological Classification of Pain

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# Several Pathophysiologies May Contribute to Chronic Pain



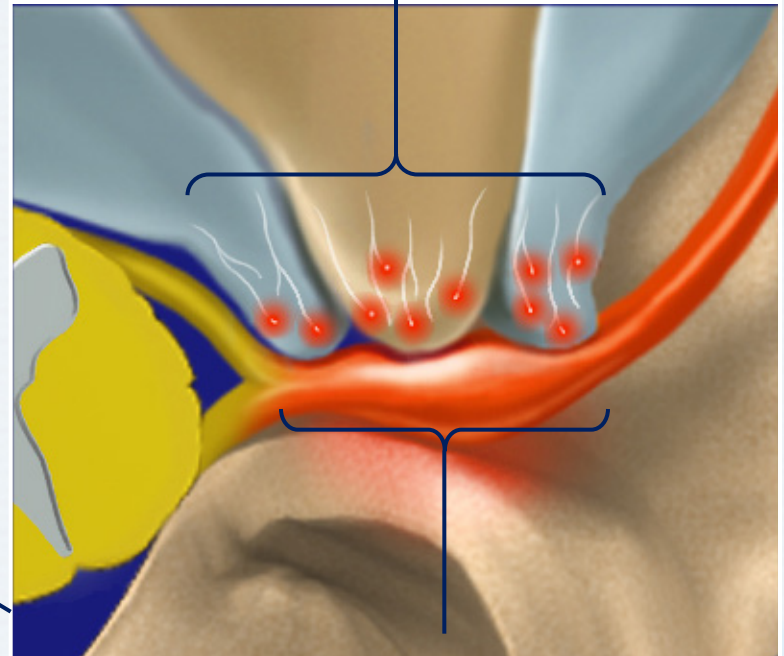
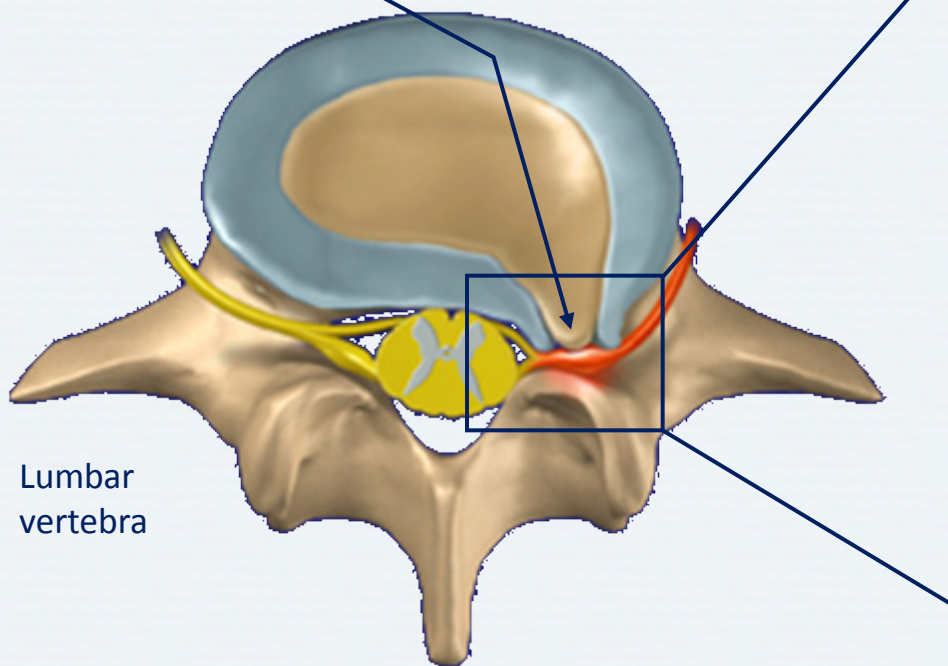


# Example of Coexisting Pain: Herniated Disc Causing Low Back Pain and Lumbar Radicular Pain

Disc herniation

Activation of peripheral nociceptors –  
cause of nociceptive pain component<sup>1</sup>

Lumbar  
vertebra



Compression and inflammation of nerve root –  
cause of neuropathic pain component<sup>2</sup>

1. Brisby H. *J Bone Joint Surg Am* 2006; 88(Suppl 2):68-71.

2. Freynhagen R, Baron R. *Curr Pain Headache Rep* 2009; 13(3):185-90.



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# Etiology

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# Many Common Conditions are Painful

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- Headache, migraine
- Trauma
- Musculoskeletal injury
- Muscle spasm
- Carpal tunnel syndrome
- Low back pain
- Osteoporosis
- Arthritis\*
- Systemic lupus erythematosus
- Gout
- Herpes zoster
- Postherpetic neuralgia
- Peripheral neuropathy
- Fibromyalgia
- Cancer
- Surgery

**\*Includes osteoarthritis, rheumatoid arthritis, ankylosing spondylitis and psoriatic arthritis**

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# Pathophysiology

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# What is nociceptive pain?

## Definition

- Pain that arises from actual or threatened damage to non-neural tissue and is due to the activation of nociceptors
- Can be somatic or visceral

## Pain Quality

- Usually aching or throbbing
- Usually time-limited (resolves when damaged tissue heals)
- Usually well localized if somatic
- May be referred if visceral
- Can become chronic

# Characteristics of Nociceptive Pain

| Type of pain             | Nociceptor location                              | Potential stimuli   | Pain localization                  |
|--------------------------|--|---|------------------------------------|
| Superficial somatic pain | Skin<br>Subcutaneous tissue<br>Mucous membranes  | External mechanical, chemical or thermal events<br>Dermatologic disorders   | Well localized                     |
| Deep somatic pain        | Muscles<br>Tendons<br>Joints<br>Fasciae<br>Bones | Overuse strain<br>Mechanical injury<br>Cramping<br>Ischemia<br>Inflammation | Localized or diffuse and radiating |
| Visceral pain            | Visceral organs*                                 | Organ distension<br>Muscle spasm<br>Traction<br>Ischemia<br>Inflammation    | Well or poorly localized           |

\*Visceral organs include the heart, lungs, gastrointestinal tract, pancreas, liver, gallbladder, kidneys and bladder.

American Pain Society. *Pain: Current Understanding of Assessment, Management, and Treatments*. Available at:

<http://www.americanpainsociety.org/education/content/enduringmaterials.html>. Accessed: October 8, 2013.

# Examples of Nociceptive Pain

| Type of Pain             | Pain Quality   | Signs and Symptoms   | Examples  |
|--------------------------|--|--|---|
| Superficial somatic pain | Sharp, pricking or burning sensation   | Cutaneous tenderness<br>Hyperalgesia<br>Hyperesthesia<br>Allodynia             | Sun, chemical or thermal burns<br>Skin cuts and contusions                          |
| Deep somatic pain        | Usually dull or aching, cramping   | Tenderness<br>Reflex muscle spasm<br>Sympathetic hyperactivity**               | Arthritis pain<br>Tendonitis<br>Myofascial pain                                     |
| Visceral pain*           | Deep aching or sharp stabbing pain, which is often referred to cutaneous sites | Malaise<br>Nausea<br>Vomiting<br>Sweating<br>Tenderness<br>Reflex muscle spasm | Colic<br>Appendicitis<br>Pancreatitis<br>Peptic ulcer disease<br>Bladder distension |

\*Visceral organs include the heart, lungs, gastrointestinal tract, pancreas, liver, gallbladder, kidneys and bladder.

\*\*Symptoms and signs of sympathetic (autonomic) nervous system hyperactivity include increased heart rate, blood pressure, and respiratory rate; sweating pallor; dilated pupils; nausea; vomiting dry mouth; and increased muscle tension.

American Pain Society. *Pain: Current Understanding of Assessment, Management, and Treatments*. Available at:

<http://www.americanpainsociety.org/education/content/enduringmaterials.html>. Accessed: October 8, 2013.



# Somatic vs. Visceral Pain

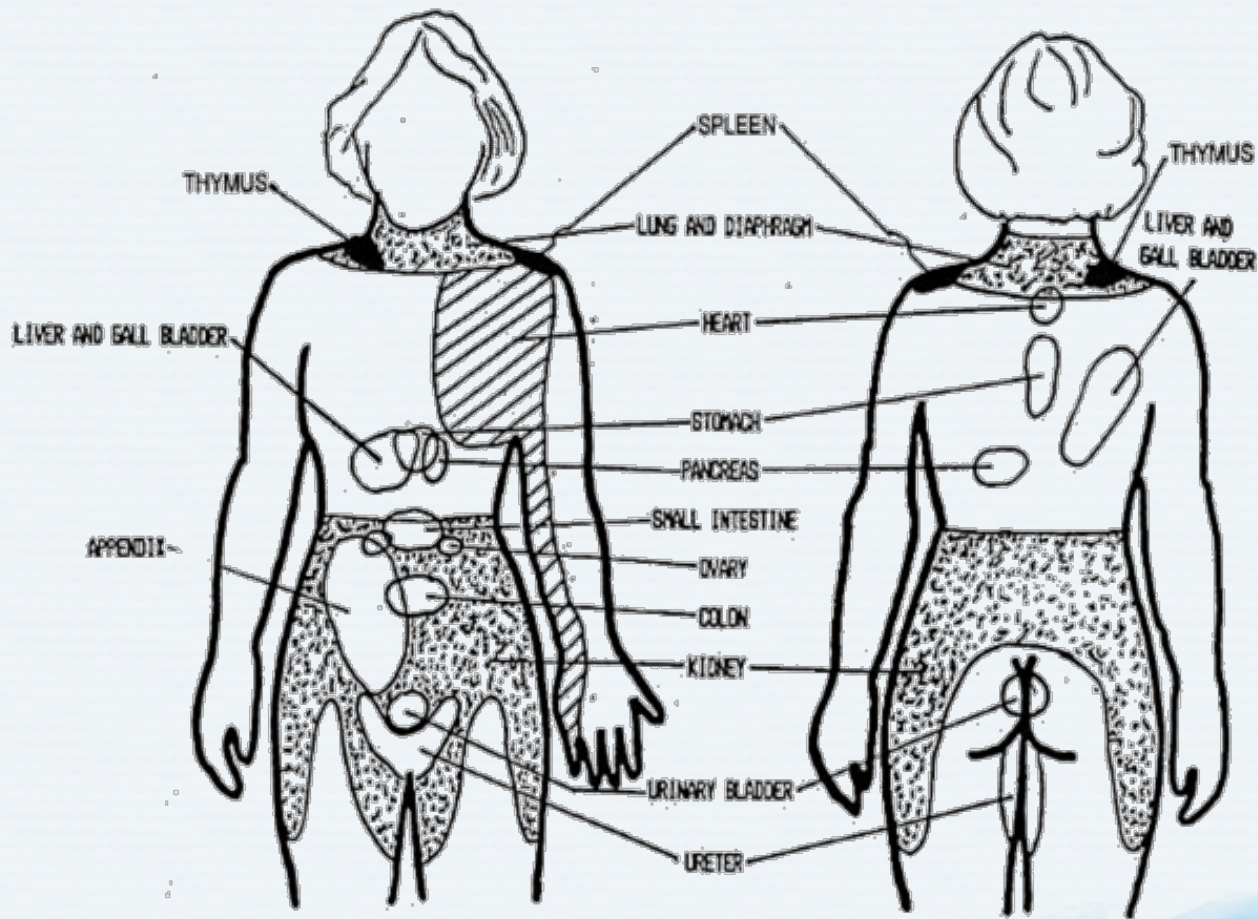
## Somatic

- Nociceptors are involved
- Often well localized
- Usually described as throbbing or aching
- Can be superficial (skin, muscle) or deep (joints, tendons, bones)

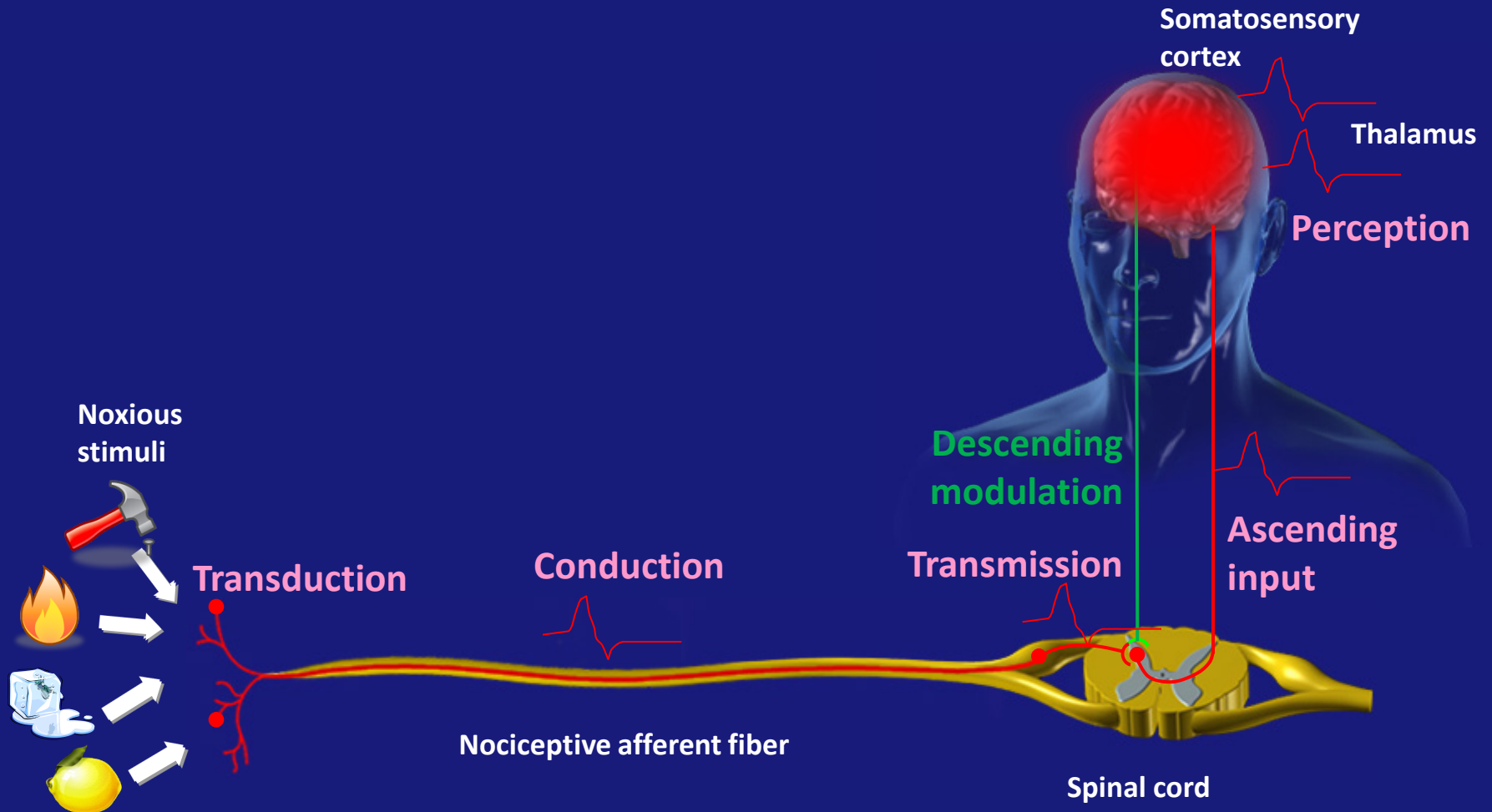
## Visceral

- Involves hollow organ and smooth muscle nociceptors that are sensitive to stretching, hypoxia and inflammation
- Pain is usually referred, poorly localized, vague and diffuse
- May be associated with autonomic symptoms (e.g., pallor, sweating, nausea, blood pressure and heart rate changes)

# Referred Pain

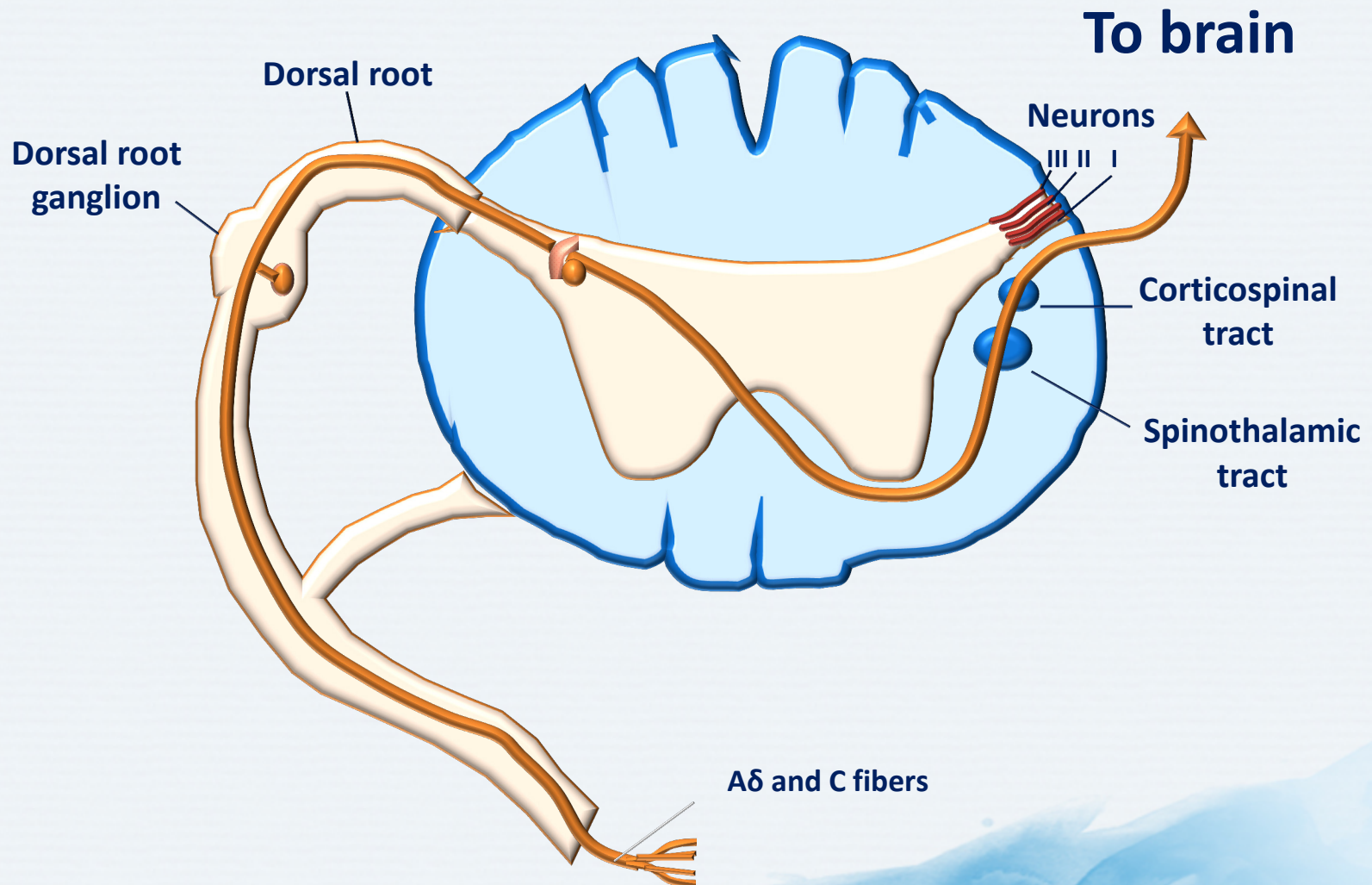


# Nociception: Neural Process of Encoding Noxious Stimuli



Consequences of encoding may be autonomic (e.g., elevated blood pressure) or behavioral (motor withdrawal reflex or more complex nocifensive behavior). Pain perception is not necessarily implied.

# Nociception





# Primary Nociception Is Accomplished through Peripheral Nociceptors: C Fibers and A $\delta$ Fibers

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| Characteristic      | A $\delta$ fibers                                  | C fibers                                       |
|---------------------|--|--|
| Receptive fields    | Small  | Broad  |
| Diameter            | Large  | Small  |
| Myelination         | Yes  | No   |
| Receptors           | Nociceptors<br>Thermoreceptors<br>Mechanoreceptors | Nociceptors<br>High threshold mechanoreceptors |
| Conduction velocity | Rapid (10–30 m/s)                                  | Slow (0.5–2.0 m/s)                             |
| Activation stimuli  | Thermal<br>Mechanical                              | Polymodal                                      |

# Peripheral Nociceptors in Chronic Pain

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- Sustained inflammation causes prolonged stimulation of C fibers
- Gene transcription altered at dorsal root ganglia and dorsal horn neurons
  - Vanilloid receptor 1 (VR1) and SNS/PN3 sodium channels increase on nociceptors
- Prolonged elevation of nociceptor excitability, chronic pain persisting after initial injury healed
- Similar changes can follow peripheral nerve injury

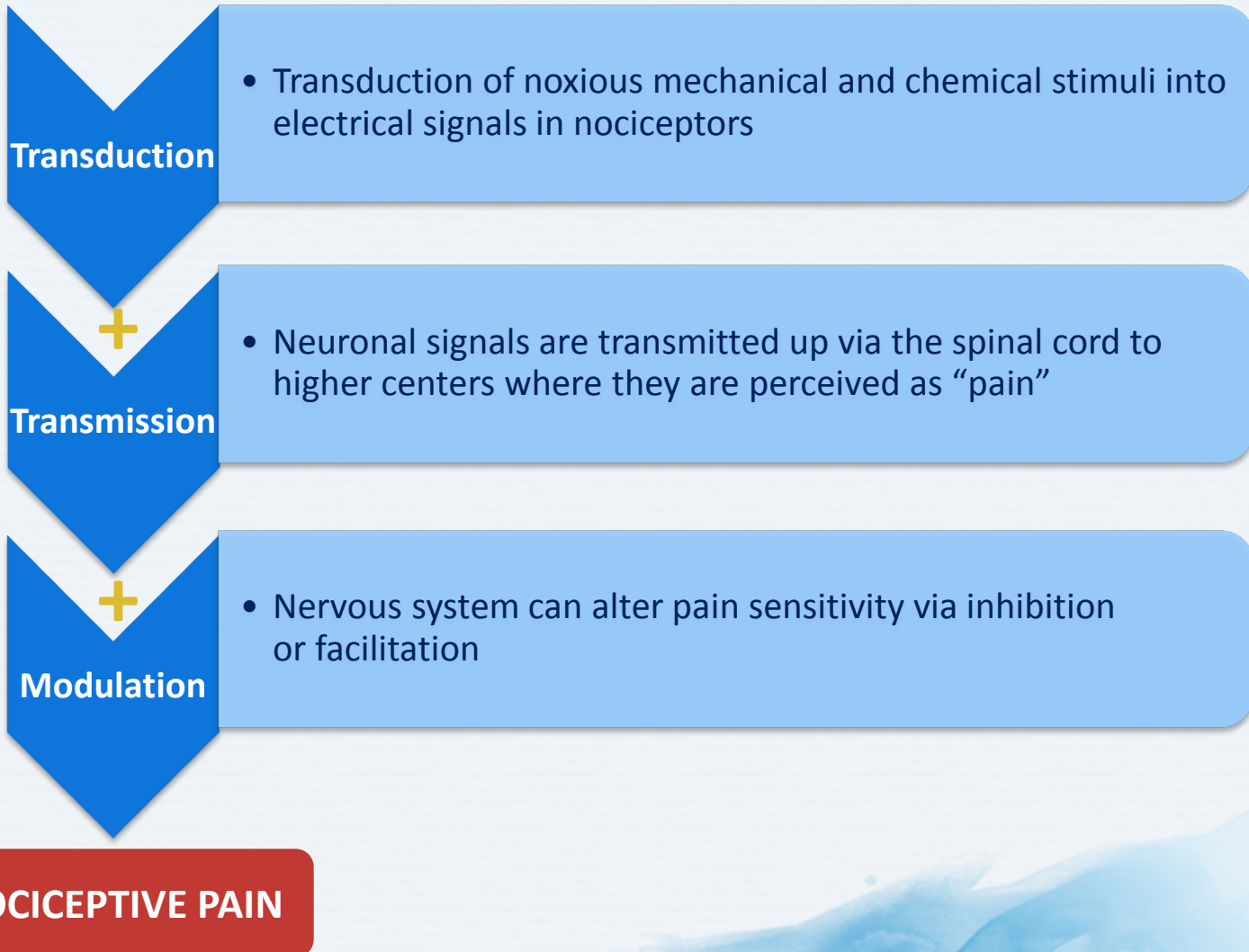
**VR1 detects noxious heat and is also sensitive to capsaicin.**

**SNS/PN3 allows sodium to enter neuron, thus decreasing firing threshold.**

Messeguer A *et al. Curr Neuropharmacol* 2006; 4(1):1-15; Tate S *et al. Nature Neurosci* 1998; 1(8):653-55.



# Nociceptive Pain



# Transduction via Endogenous Mediators

## Noxious stimuli

- Mechanical
- Thermal
- Chemical



## Mediators

- Prostaglandins
- Leukotrienes
- Substance P
- Histamine
- Bradykinin
- Serotonin
- Hydroxyacids
- Reactive oxygen species
- Inflammatory cytokines and chemokines

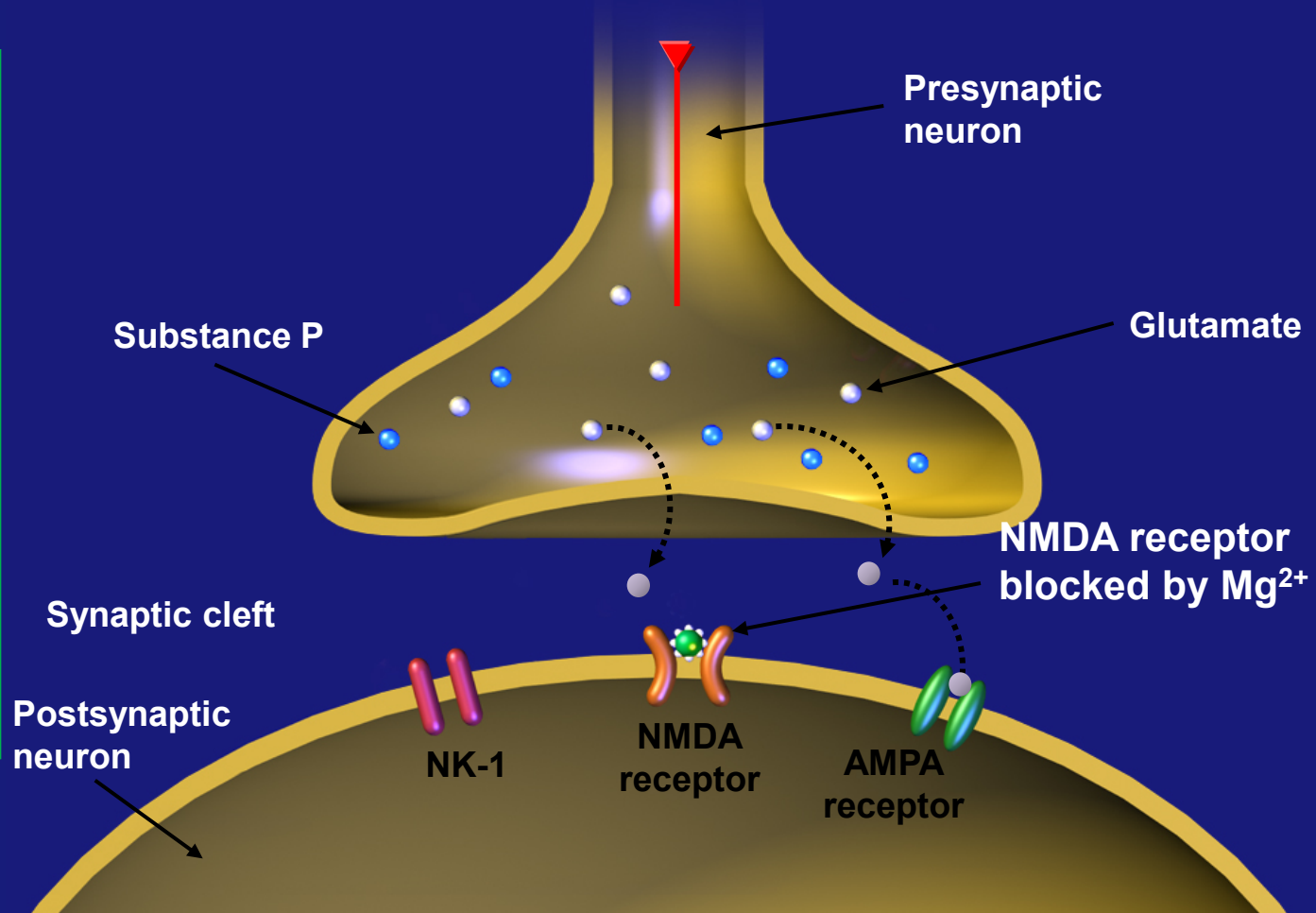


## Receptors/channels on nociceptors



# Transmission via Neurotransmitters

1. Impulses reach terminals of presynaptic neuron
2. Glutamate is released into synaptic cleft
3. Glutamate binds to AMPA receptor
4. Impulse is transmitted to postsynaptic neuron



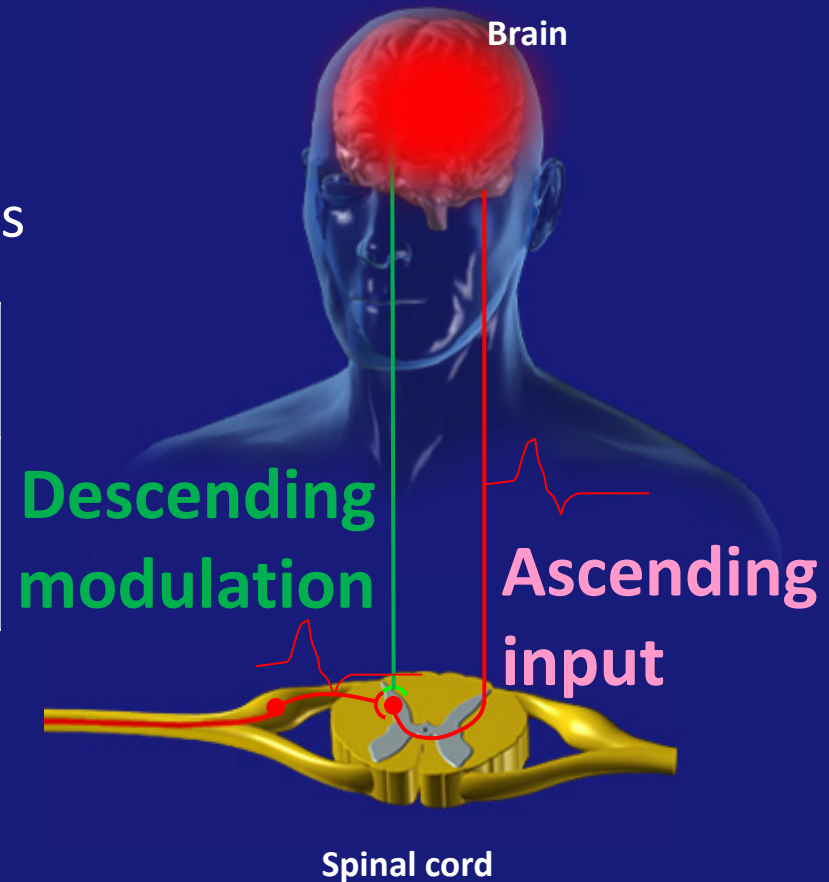
AMPA = 2-amino-3-(3-hydroxy-5-methyl-isoxazol-4-yl) propanoic acid; NK = neurokinin; NMDA = N-methyl-D-aspartate

Fields HL *et al.* In: McMahon SB, Koltzenburg M (eds). *Wall and Melzack's Textbook of Pain*. 5th ed. Elsevier; London, UK: 2006; Julius D, Basbaum AI. *Nature* 2001; 413(6852):203-10; Woolf CJ, Salter MW. *Science* 2000; 288(5472):1765-68.

# Pain Modulation

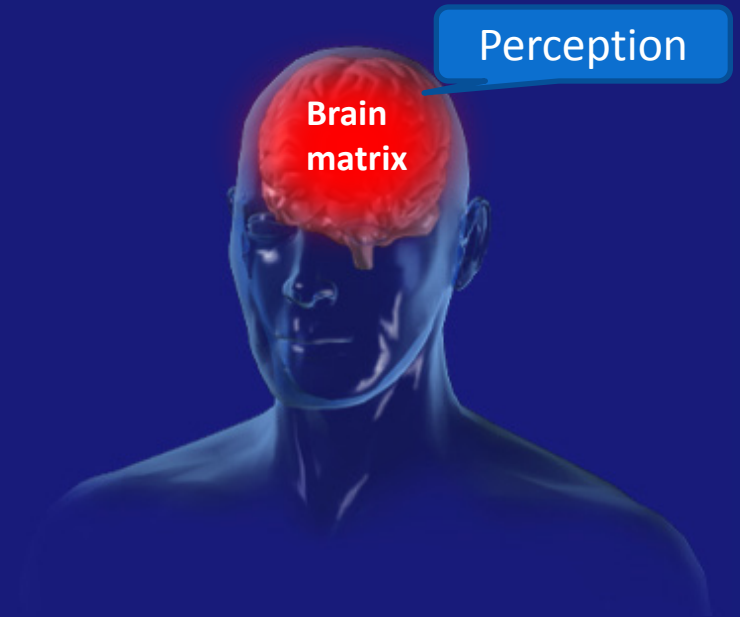
- Pain is modulated via **ascending nociceptive** and **descending inhibitory/facilitatory** spinal tracts

| Ascending<br>Nociceptive | Descending<br>Inhibitory/facilitatory   |
|--------------------------|---|
| C fibers<br>Aδ fibers    | Serotonin<br>Norepinephrine<br>Dopamine |

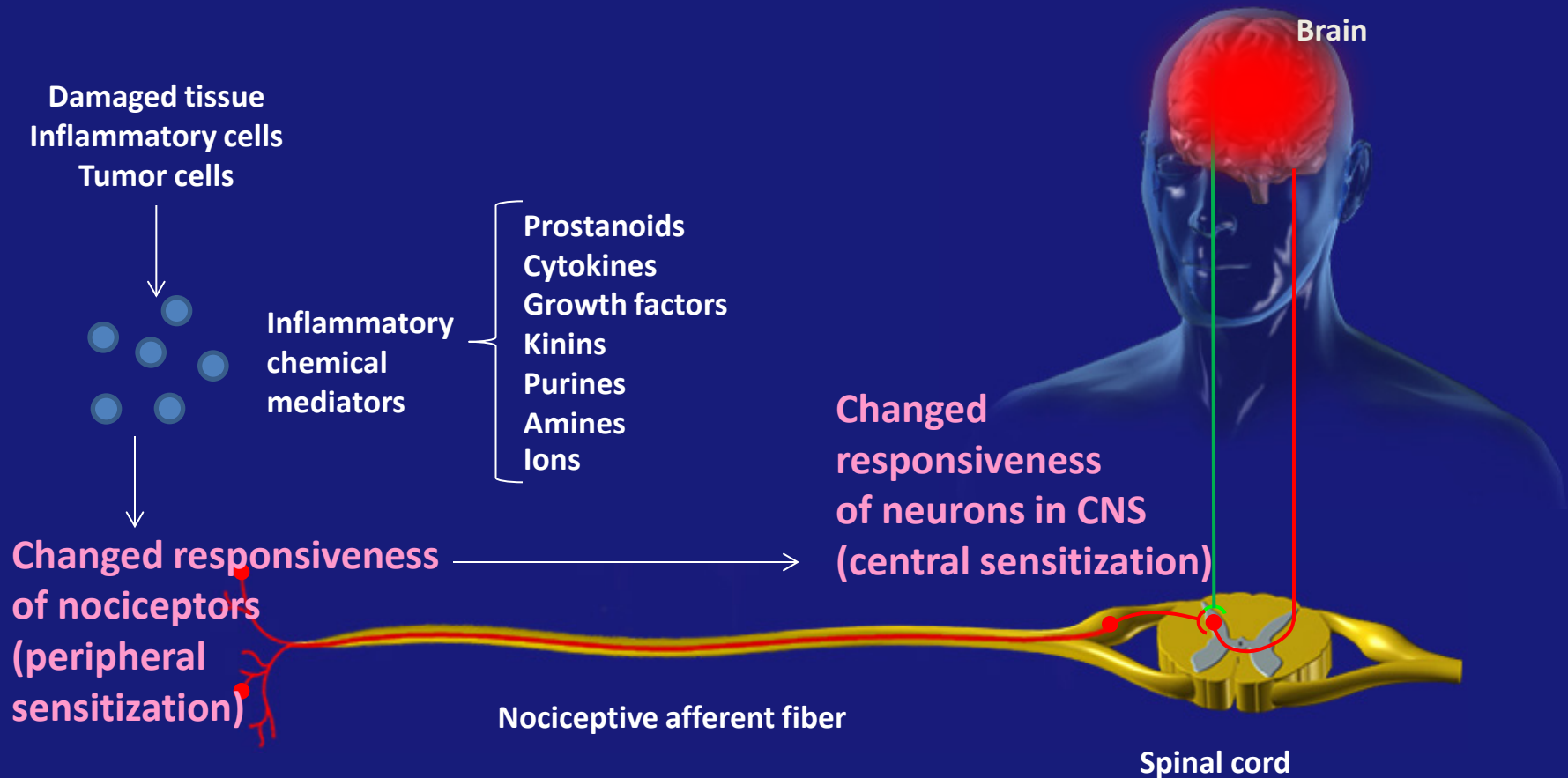


# Pain Perception

- Spinal cord transmits pain signals to specific nuclei in the thalamus, and from there to wide variety of regions in the brain – collectively known as the “pain matrix”
- Pain perception can also be altered without any external stimuli (i.e., through emotion, distraction, placebo, etc.)



# Inflammation



CNS = central nervous system

Scholz J, Woolf CJ. *Nat Neurosci* 2002; 5(Suppl):1062-7.



# What is neuropathic pain?

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## Definition

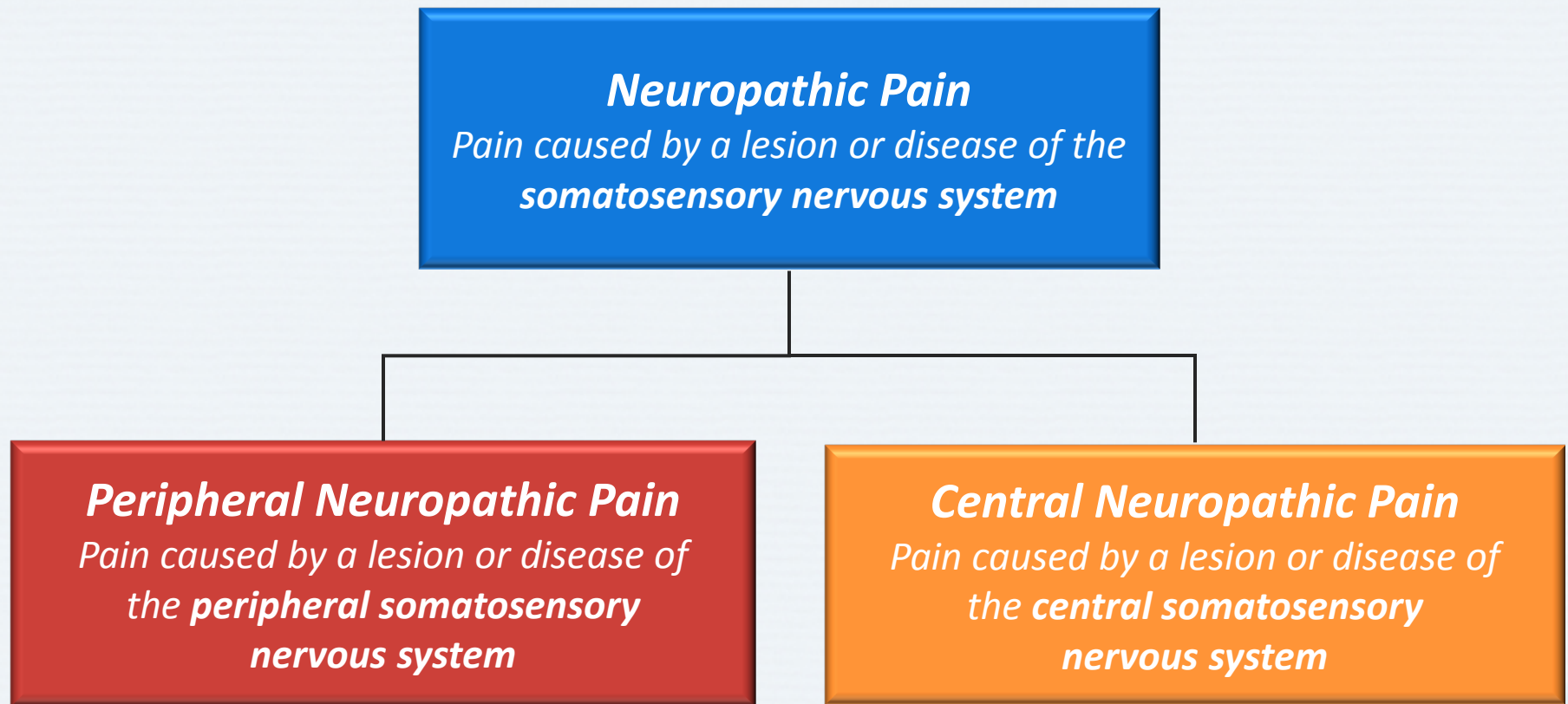
- Pain caused by a lesion or disease of the somatosensory nervous system
- Can be peripheral or central

## Pain Quality

- Burning
- Lancing
- Electric shock-like
- Often diffuse
- Frequently with allodynia and/or hyperalgesia

# What is neuropathic pain?

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# Common Descriptors of Neuropathic Pain

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***Burning***



***Tingling***



***Pins and needles***

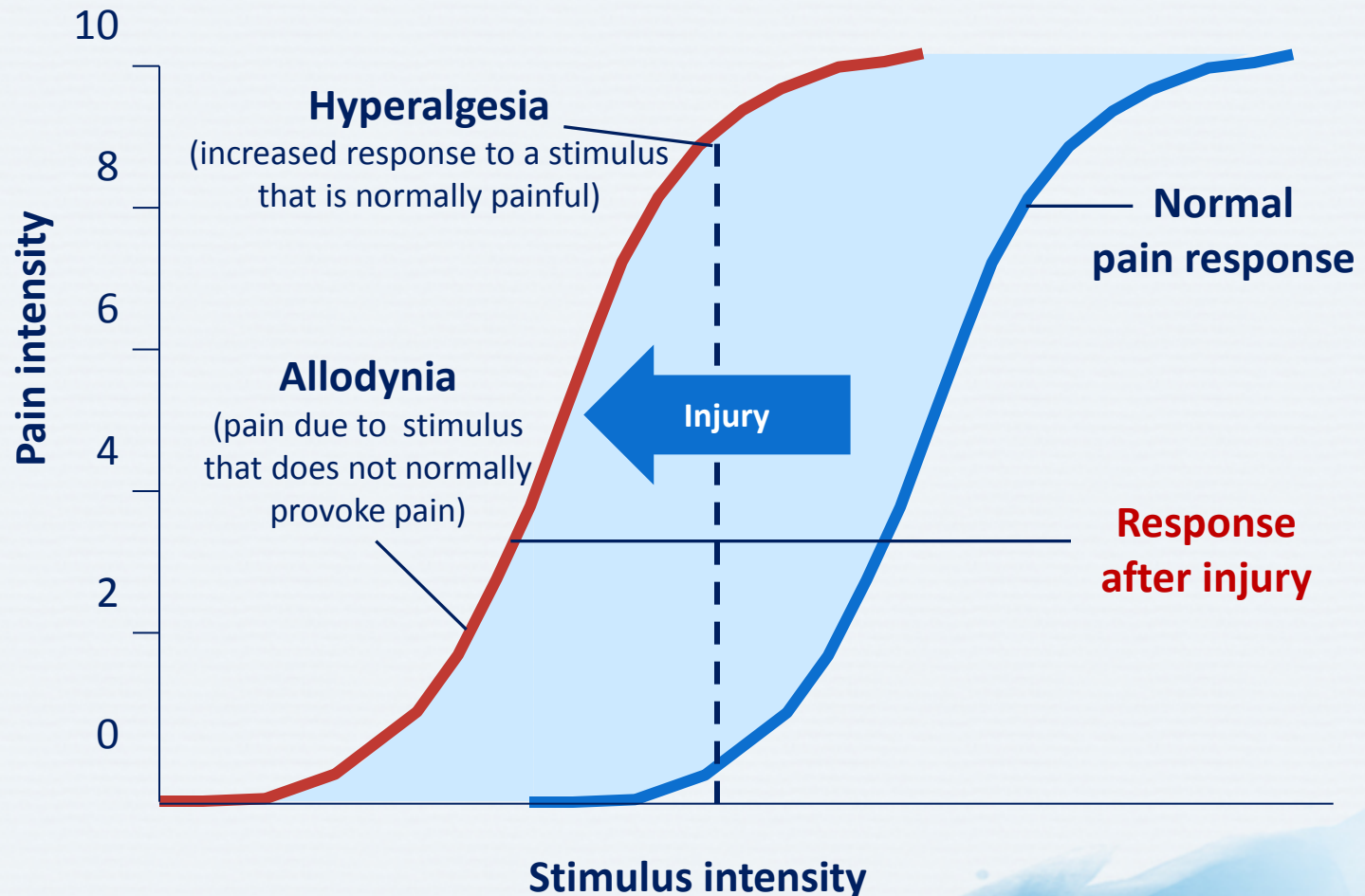


***Electric shock-like***

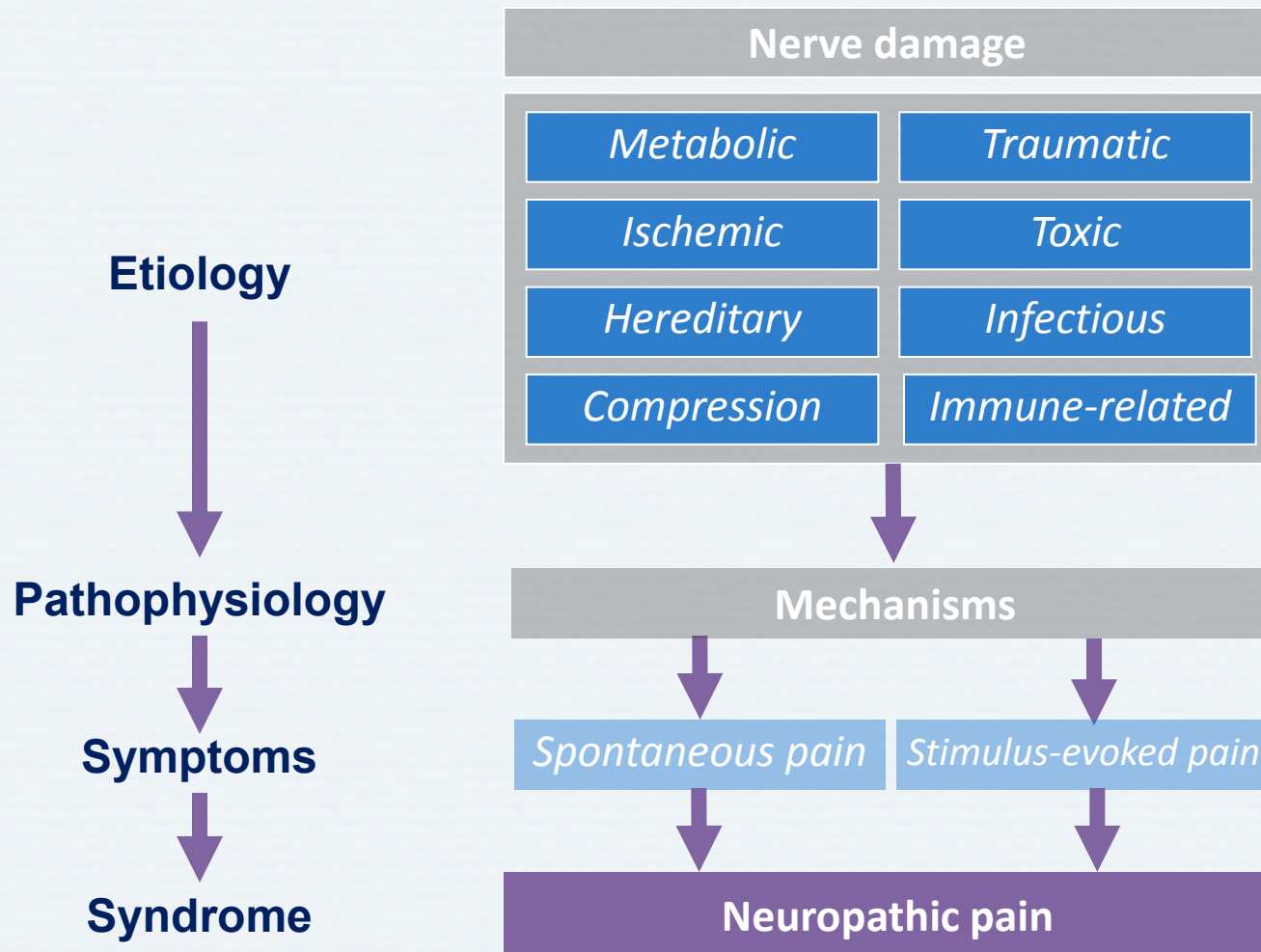


***Numbness***

# Neuropathic Pain Is Characterized by Changes in Pain Response to Painful Stimuli



# Development of Neuropathic Pain





# Pathophysiology of Neuropathic Pain

## Peripheral mechanisms

- Membrane hyperexcitability
- Ectopic discharges
- Transcriptional changes

## Central mechanisms

**Hyperexcitability**

**Loss of  
inhibitory controls**

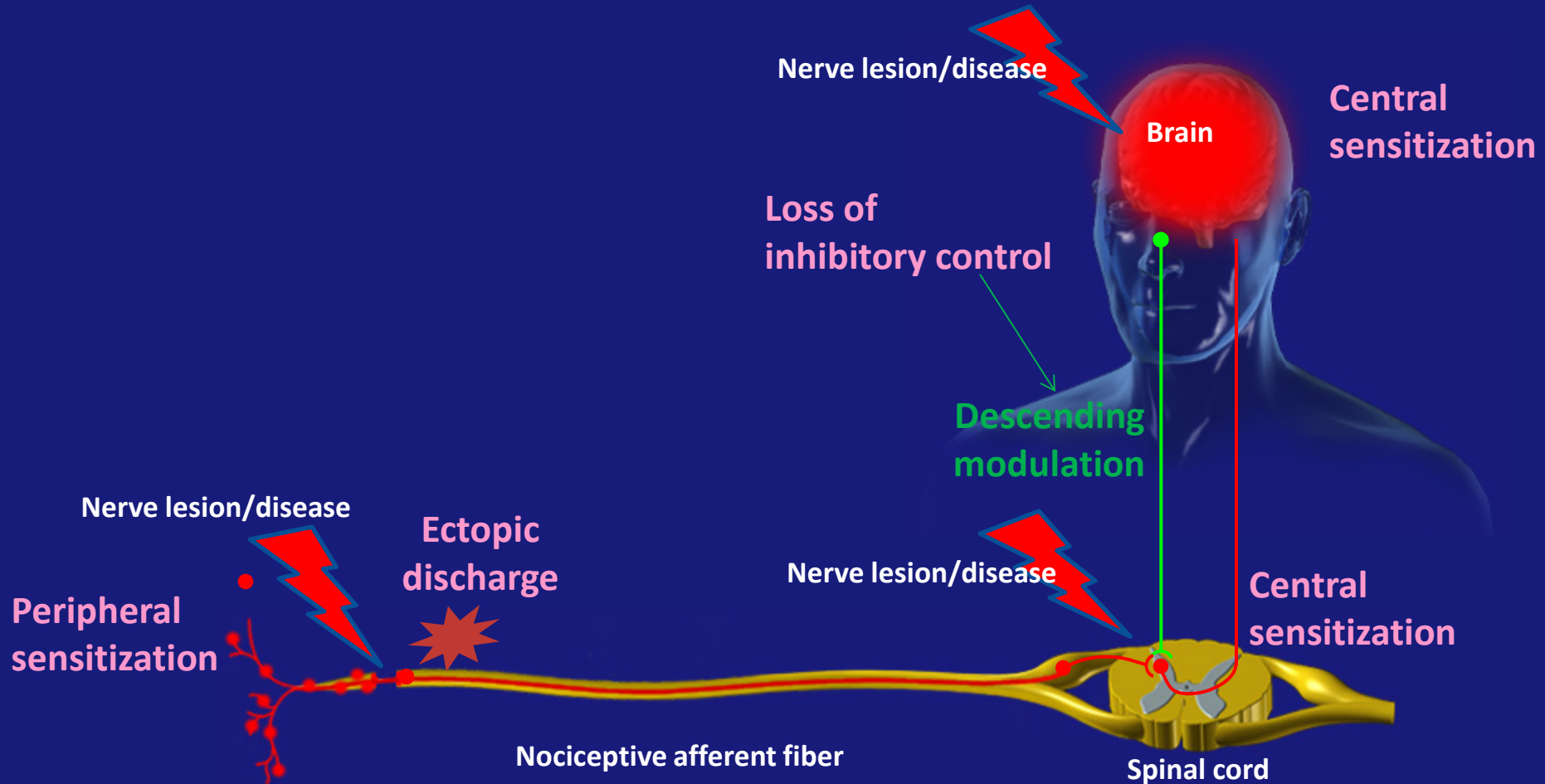
**Reorganization**

**Sensitization**

- Peripheral
- Central

**Neuropathic  
pain**

# Mechanisms of Neuropathic Pain



# Neuropathic Pain: A $\beta$ , A $\delta$ and C Fibers

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| Characteristic      | A $\beta$ fibers       | A $\delta$ fibers | C fibers |
|---------------------|------------------------|-------------------|----------|
| Diameter            | Large                  | Larger            | Small    |
| Myelination         | Yes                    | Yes               | No       |
| Conduction velocity | Rapid                  | Intermediate      | Slow     |
| Activation stimuli  | Non-noxious mechanical | Noxious           | Noxious  |

# Sensory Processing and Neuropathic Pain

| Nerve function   | Stimulus                                  | Primary afferent                      | Sensation                                | Mechanism   |
|------------------|---|---------------------------------------|--|---|
| <b>Normal</b>    | Innocuous Mechanical                      | A $\beta$                             | Normal touch                             | Normal function   |
|                  | Noxious Mechanical<br>Thermal<br>Chemical | A $\delta$ nociceptor<br>C nociceptor | Normal sharp pain<br>Normal burning pain |   |
| <b>Decreased</b> | Innocuous Mechanical                      | A $\beta$                             | Tactile hypoesthesia                     | Decreased transmission of impulses                      |
|                  | Noxious Mechanical<br>Thermal<br>Chemical | A $\delta$ nociceptor<br>C nociceptor | Mechanical<br>Heat or cold hypoalgesia   |   |
| <b>Increased</b> | Innocuous Mechanical                      | A $\beta$                             | Dynamic mechanical allodynia             | Many theories (e.g., sensitization)                     |
|                  | Noxious Mechanical<br>Thermal<br>Chemical | A $\delta$ nociceptor<br>C nociceptor | Mechanical<br>Heat or cold hyperalgesia  | Many theories (e.g., wind-up, peripheral sensitization) |

# What is central sensitization/ dysfunctional pain?

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## Definition

- Amplification of neural signaling within the CNS that elicits pain hypersensitivity

## Examples

- Fibromyalgia
- Irritable bowel syndrome
- Interstitial cystitis
- Temporomandibular joint pain
- May be present in many patients with chronic low back pain, osteoarthritis and rheumatoid arthritis

## Pain Quality

- Burning
- Lancing
- Electric shock-like
- Often diffuse
- Frequently with allodynia and/or hyperalgesia



# Clinical Features of Central Sensitization/Dysfunctional Pain

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## Pain

- Pain all over body
- Muscles stiff/achy
- Headaches
- Pain in jaw
- Pelvic pain
- Bladder/urination pain

## Anxiety/depression

- Sad or depressed
- Anxiety
- Stress makes symptoms worse
- Tension in neck and shoulder
- Grind/clench teeth

## Fatigue

- Do not sleep well
- Unrefreshed in morning
- Easily tired with physical activity

## Other symptoms

- Difficulty concentrating
- Need help with daily activities
- Sensitive to bright lights
- Skin problems
- Diarrhea/constipation

# Neuronal Plasticity

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*Changes in neuron function, chemical profile  
or structure as a result of painful stimulation  
and nerve damage*

# Neuronal Plasticity and Pain Pathogenesis

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- Neuronal plasticity can cause pain<sup>1,2</sup>
  - Neuropathic pain is pain felt in absence of nociceptor stimulation
    - From a lesion or disease affecting the somatosensory system
- Amplified pain perception due to changes in pain processing in CNS<sup>1,3</sup>
  - Characterized by hyperalgesia and allodynia<sup>2</sup>

**CNS = central nervous system**

1. Costigan M *et al. Annu Rev Neurosci* 2009; 32:1-32;

2. Woolf CJ. *Ann Intern Med* 2004; 140(6):441-51;

3. Staud R. *Arthritis Res Ther* 2006; 8(3):208-14.

# Neurons Detecting and Transmitting Pain Display “Plasticity”

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- Plasticity can be defined as:
  - Capacity to change function, chemical profile or structure
  - Response to painful stimuli and inflammation
- All contribute to altered sensitivity to pain

# 3 Forms of Neuronal Plasticity

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## Activation

- Rapid onset, substantial, readily reversible
- **Autosensitization and wind-up**

## Modulation

- Follows repeated intense stimuli
- Substantial, slowly reversible
- **Peripheral and central sensitization**

## Modification

- Follows prolonged, intense stimuli or nerve damage
- Very long-lasting
- **Persistent, pathological (neuropathic) pain**



# Autosensitization

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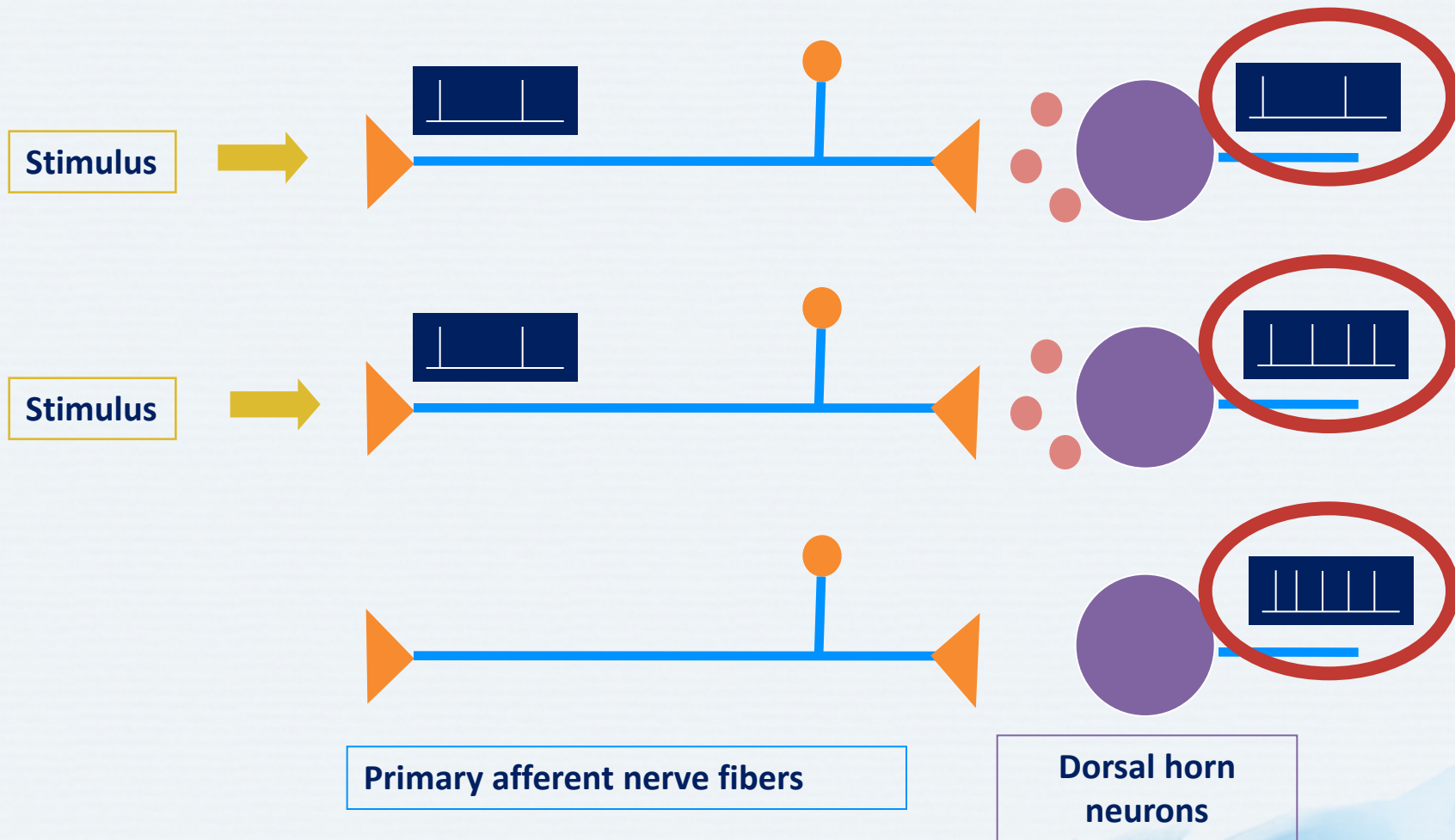
- Repeated stimulation of vanilloid receptors in nociceptors by heat, capsaicin or acidic pH cause
  - Rapid increase in receptor sensitivity
  - Increase in substantial but readily reversible “autosensitization”

# Wind-Up

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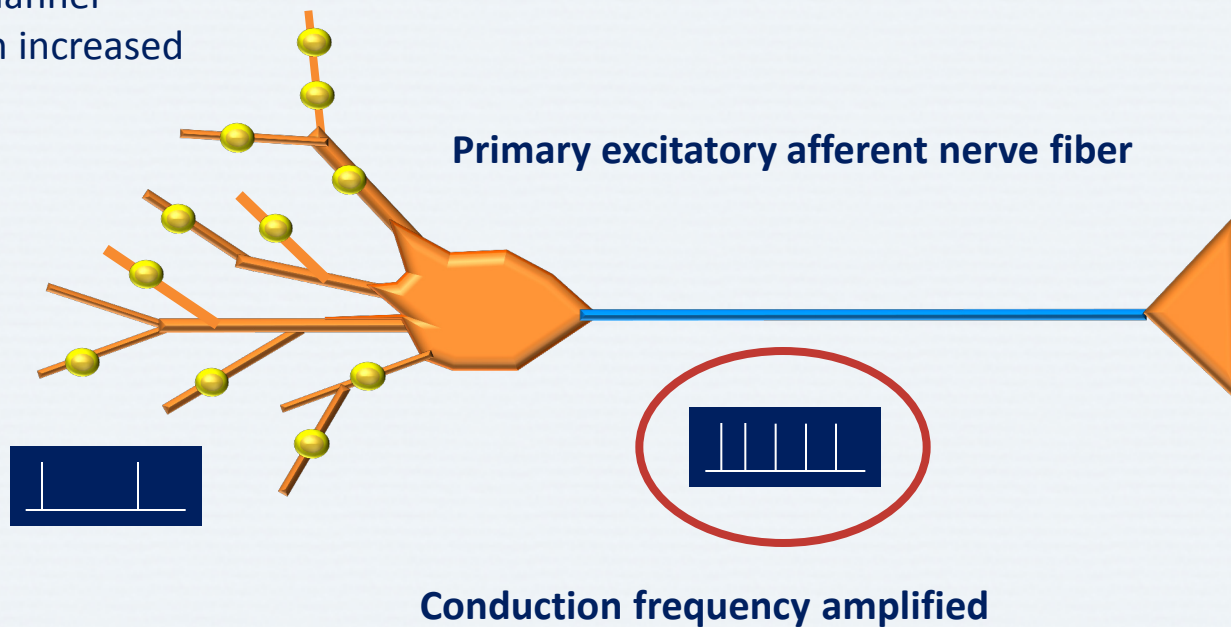
- Dorsal horn: intense or sustained noxious stimuli cause:
  - Release of neuromodulators (e.g., substance P) and glutamate
  - Long-lasting slow excitatory postsynaptic potentials and cumulative depolarization
  - Cascade of events further potentiate depolarization
  - Net result: “wind-up” of action potential discharge

# Wind-Up

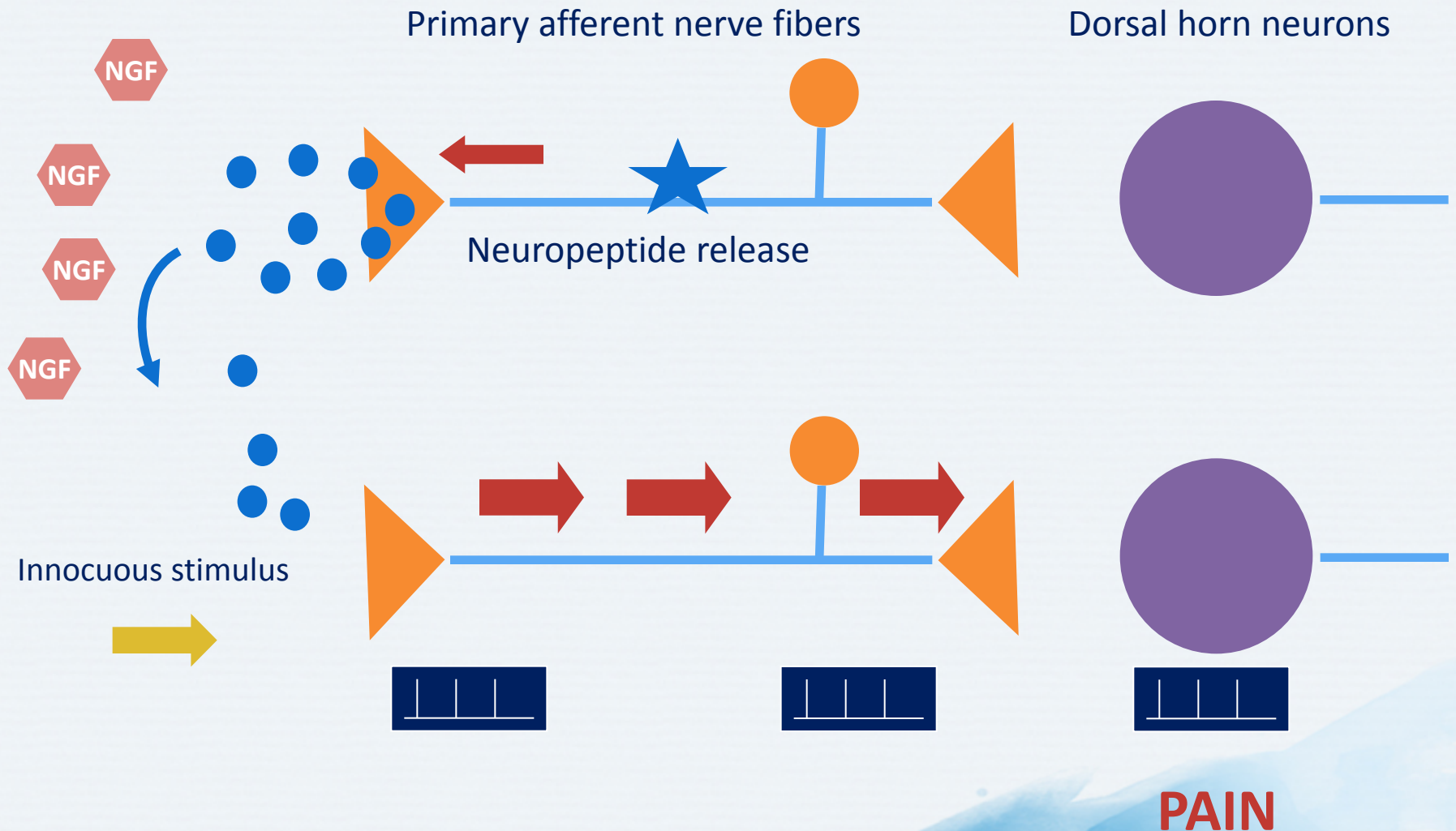


# Ectopic Discharges

- Sodium channel expression increased

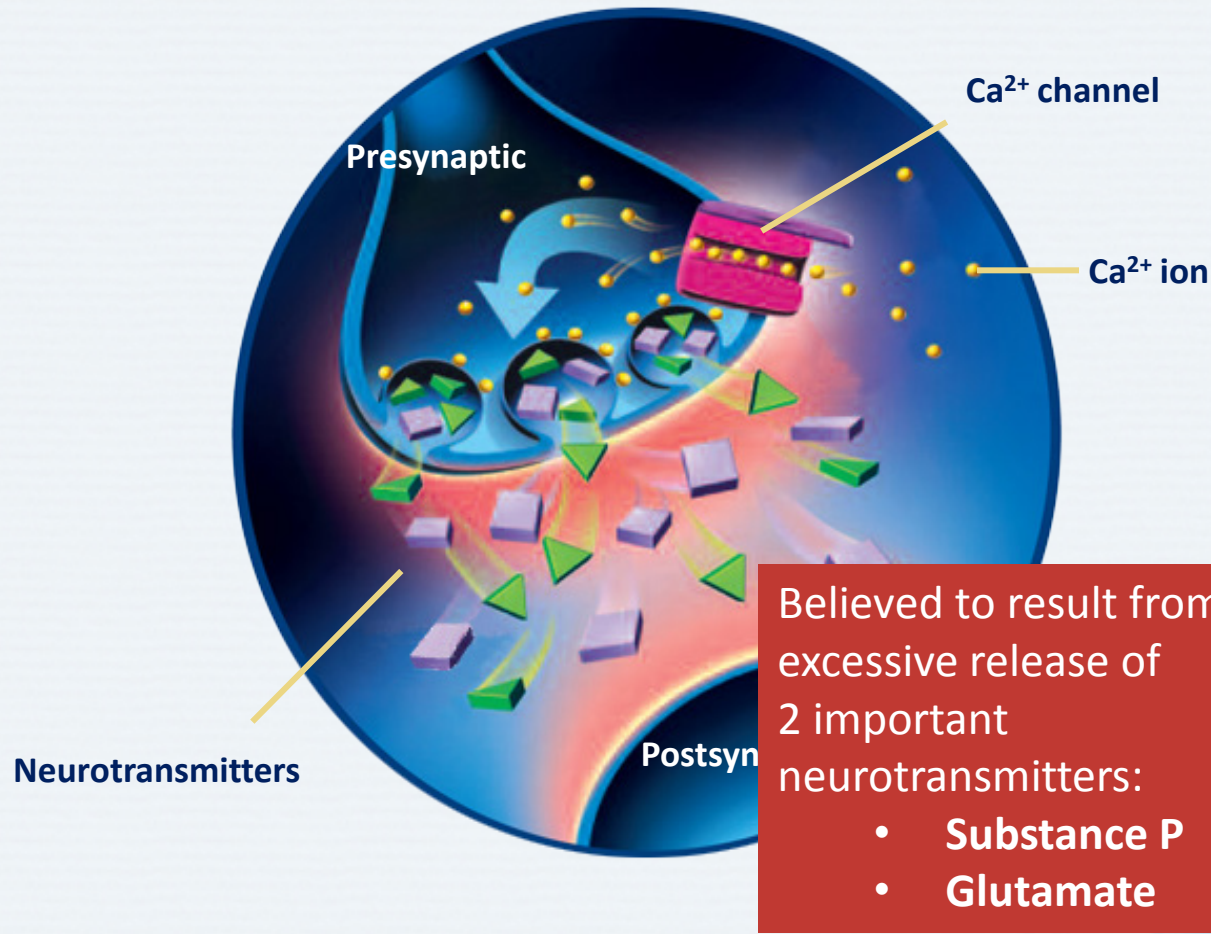


# Peripheral Sensitization

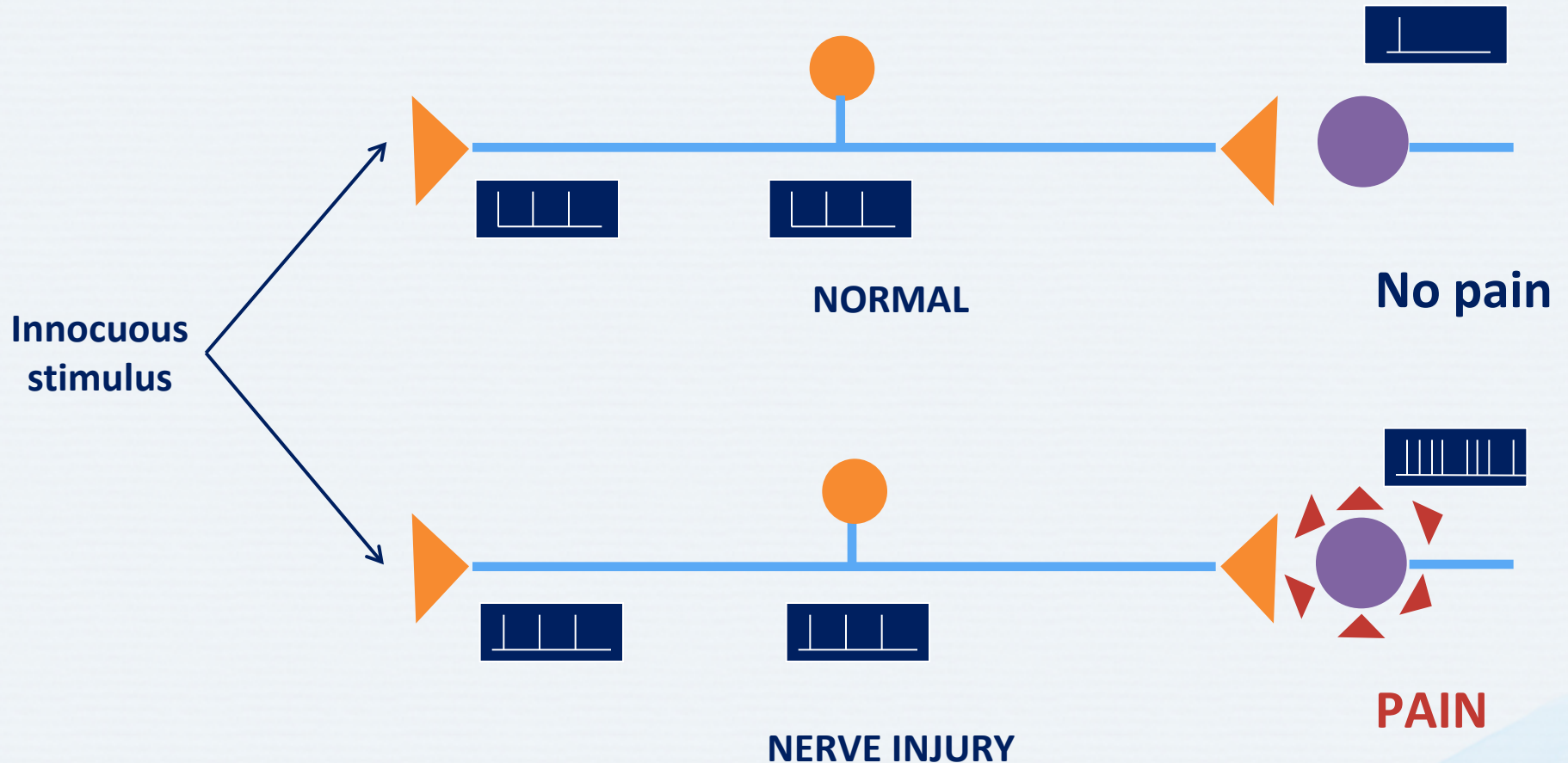




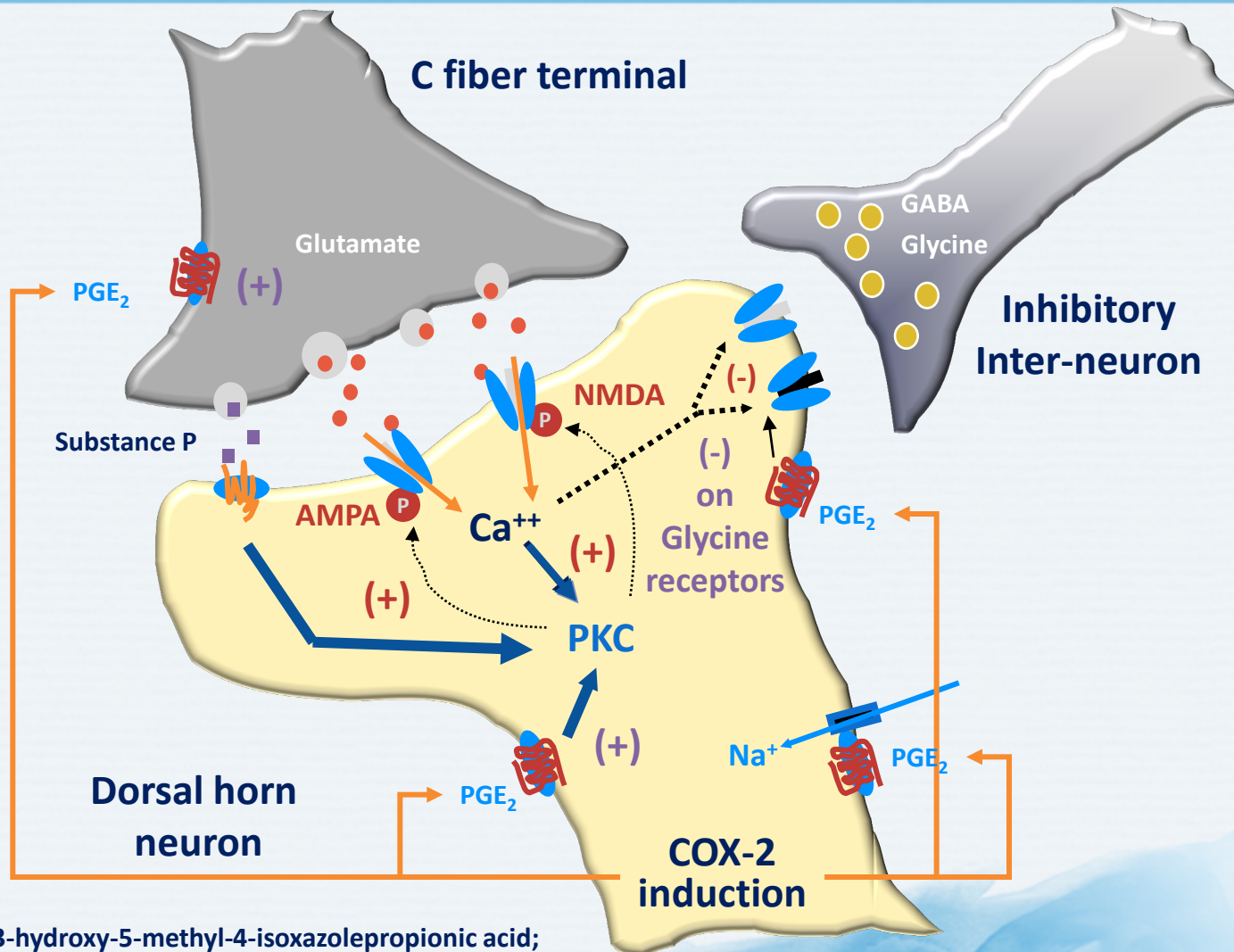
# Central Sensitization



# Central Sensitization after Nerve Injury



# Central Sensitization

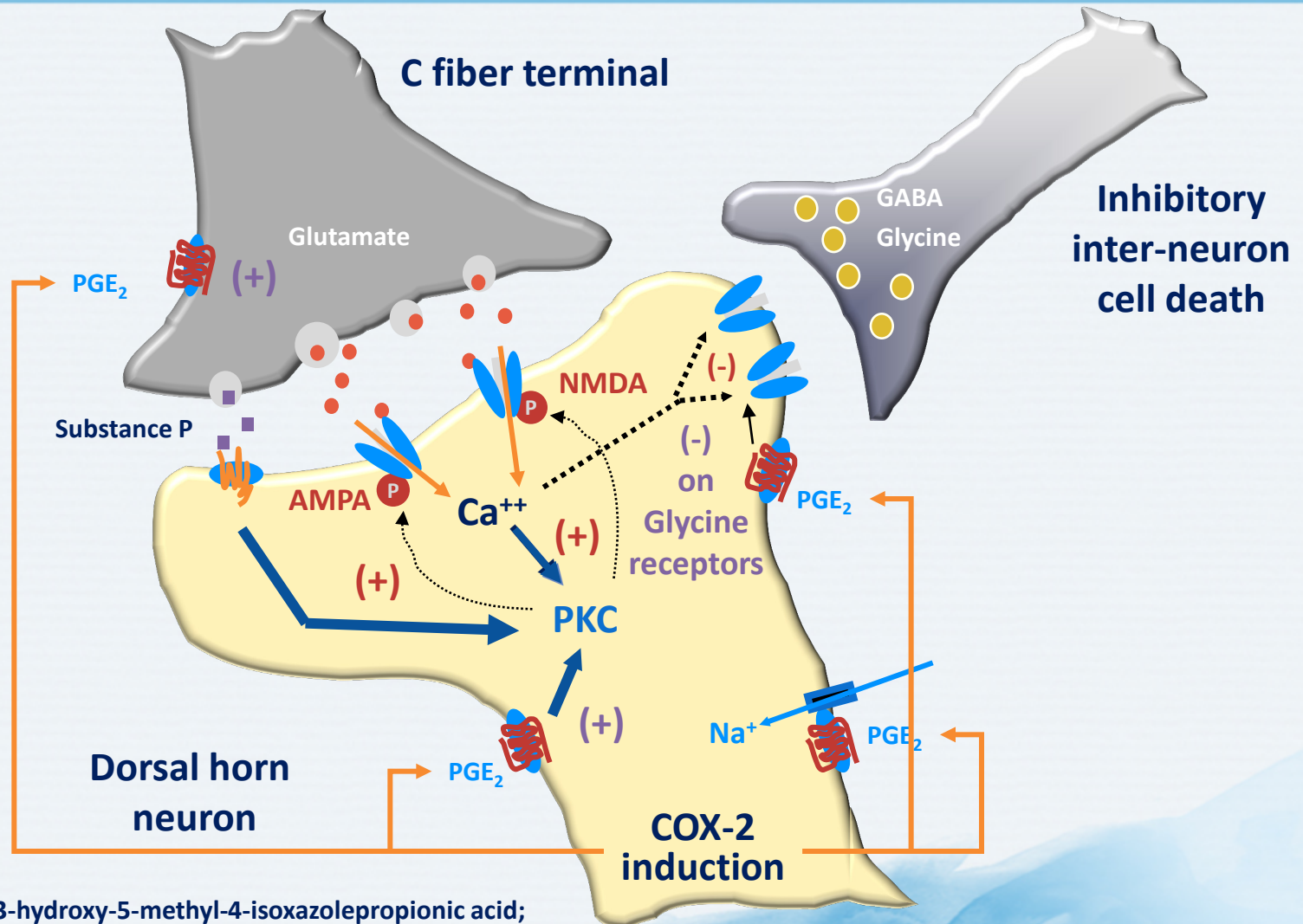


AMPA =  $\alpha$ -amino-3-hydroxy-5-methyl-4-isoxazolepropionic acid;

GABA =  $\gamma$ -aminobutyric acid; NMDA = N-methyl-D-aspartate; prostaglandin E; PKC = protein kinase C

Woolf CJ, Salter MW. *Science* 2000; 288(5472):1765-9.

# Central Sensitization

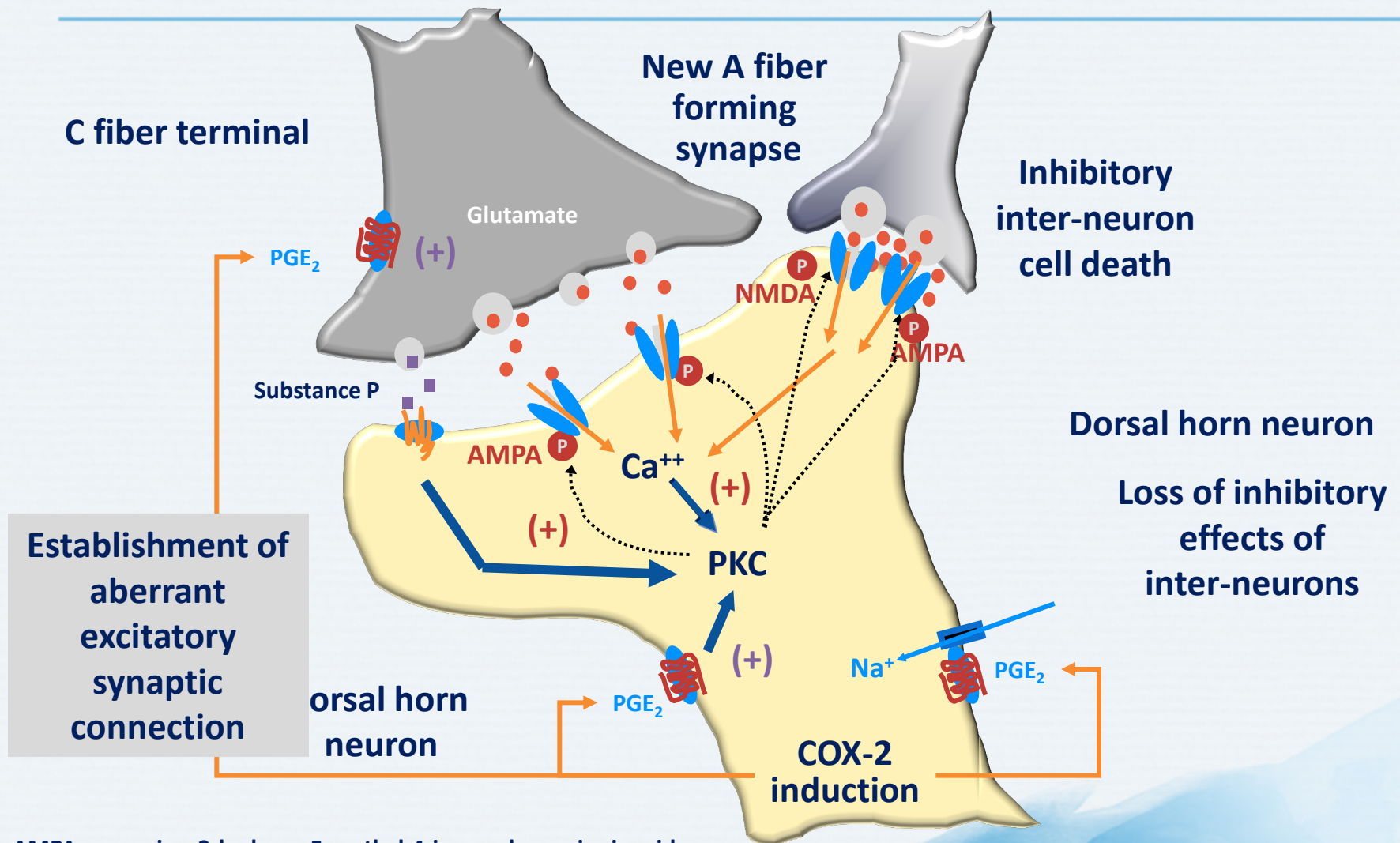


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# Central Sensitization



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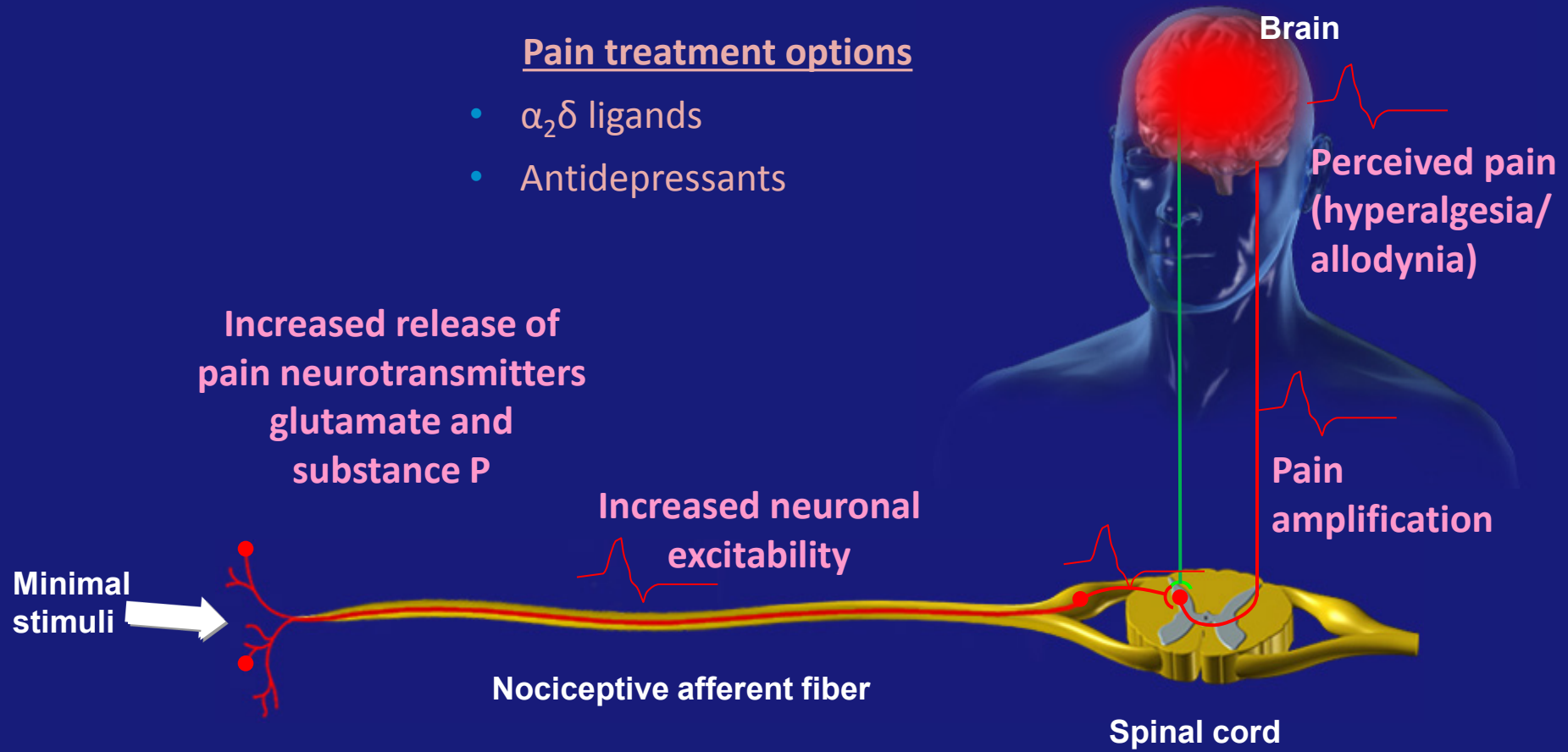
Woolf CJ, Salter MW. *Science* 2000; 288(5472):1765-9.



# Central Sensitization Produces Abnormal Pain Signaling

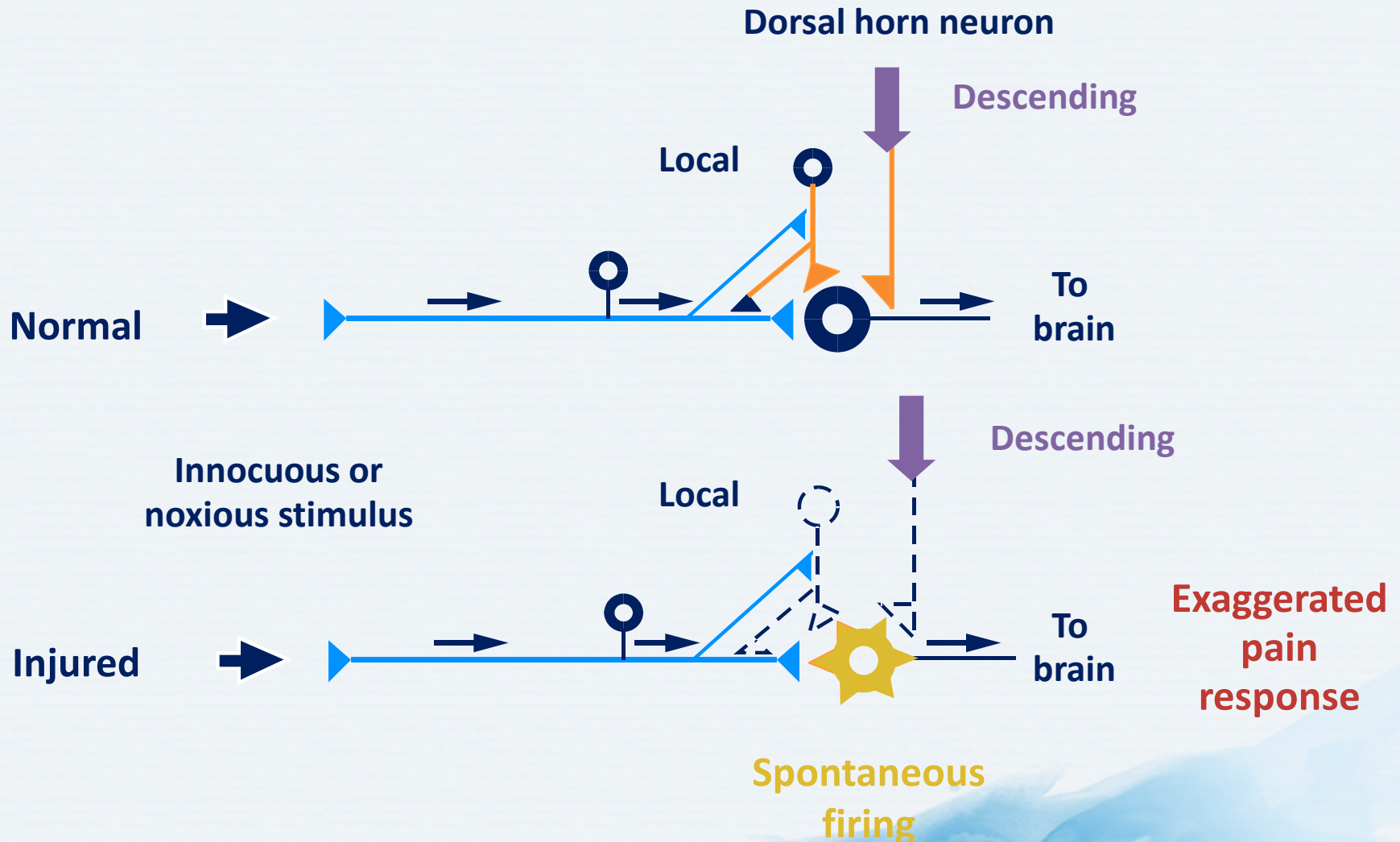
## Pain treatment options

- $\alpha_2\delta$  ligands
- Antidepressants



Adapted from: Campbell JN, Meyer RA. *Neuron* 2006; 52(1):77-92; Gottschalk A, Smith DS. *Am Fam Physician* 2001; 63(10):1979-86; Henriksson KG. *J Rehabil Med* 2003; 41(Suppl):89-94; Larson AA et al. *Pain* 2000; 87(2):201-11; Marchand S. *Rheum Dis Clin North Am* 2008; 34(2):285-309; Rao SG. *Rheum Dis Clin North Am* 2002; 28(2):235-59; Staud R. *Arthritis Res Ther* 2006; 8(3):208-14; Staud R, Rodriguez ME. *Nat Clin Pract Rheumatol* 2006; 2(2):90-8; Vaerø H et al. *Pain* 1988; 32(1):21-6; Woolf CJ et al. *Ann Intern Med* 2004; 140(6):441-51.

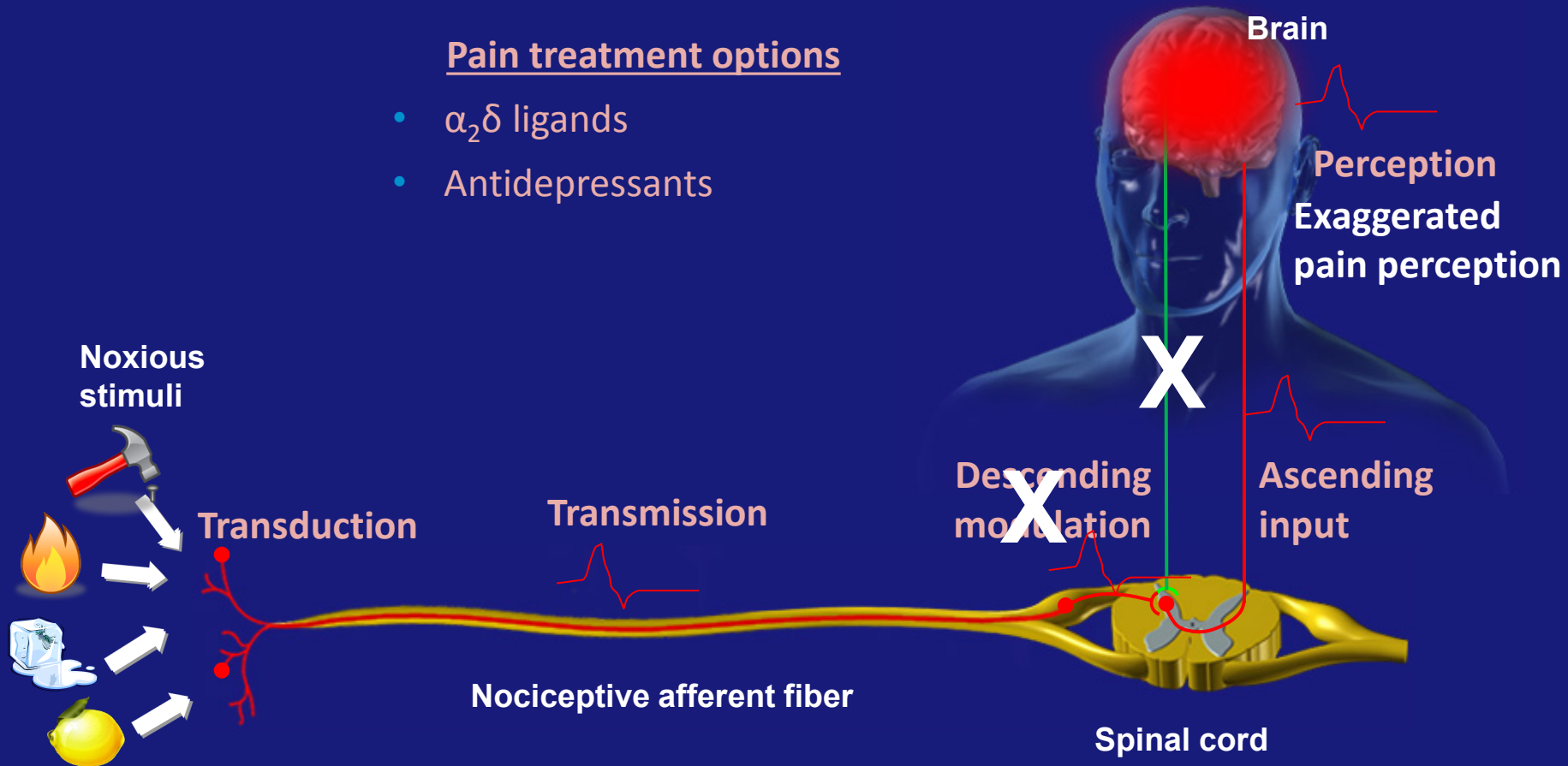
# Loss of Inhibitory Controls



# Loss of Inhibitory Control: Disinhibition

## Pain treatment options

- $\alpha_2\delta$  ligands
- Antidepressants



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# Summary

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# Pathophysiology: Summary

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- Pain can be classified according to:
  - Duration
  - Location
  - Severity
  - Pathophysiology
- 3 underlying types of pain:
  - Nociceptive pain
    - Caused by nociceptors responding to noxious stimuli
  - Neuropathic pain
    - Caused by a lesion or disease of somatosensory system
  - Central sensitization/dysfunctional pain
    - May be caused by persistent neuronal dysregulation or dysfunction