

# Systems Neuroscience

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## Taste and Smell

Daniel C. Kiper

[kiper@ini.ethz.ch](mailto:kiper@ini.ethz.ch)

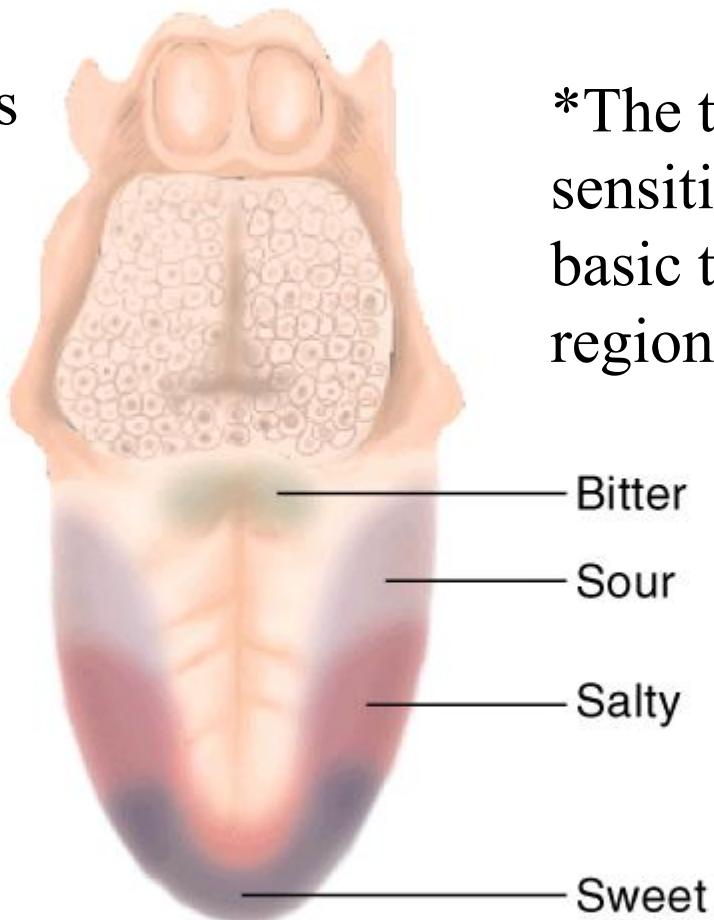
[http://www.ini.unizh.ch/~kiper/system\\_neurosci.html](http://www.ini.unizh.ch/~kiper/system_neurosci.html)

# Brain Facts -- Taste/Smell

- Average number of human taste buds = 5,000
- Number of human olfactory receptor cells = 40 million
- Number of dog olfactory receptor cells = 1 billion

## ► Sensitivity of Different Regions of the Tongue to Different Tastes

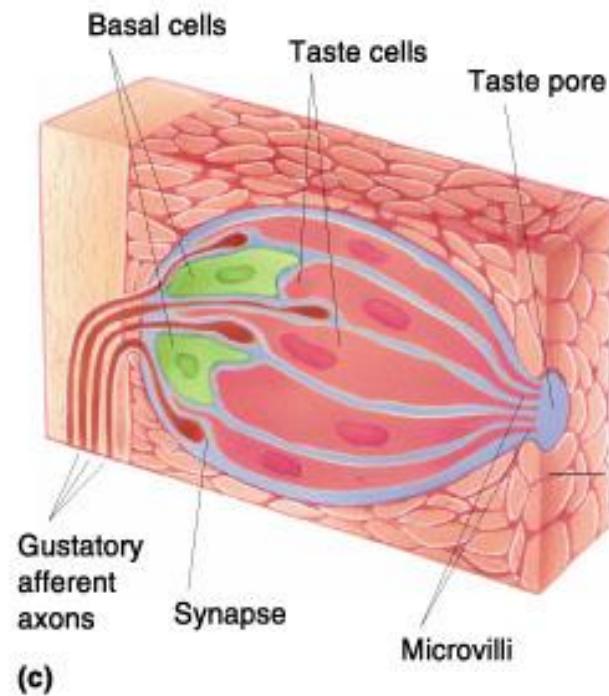
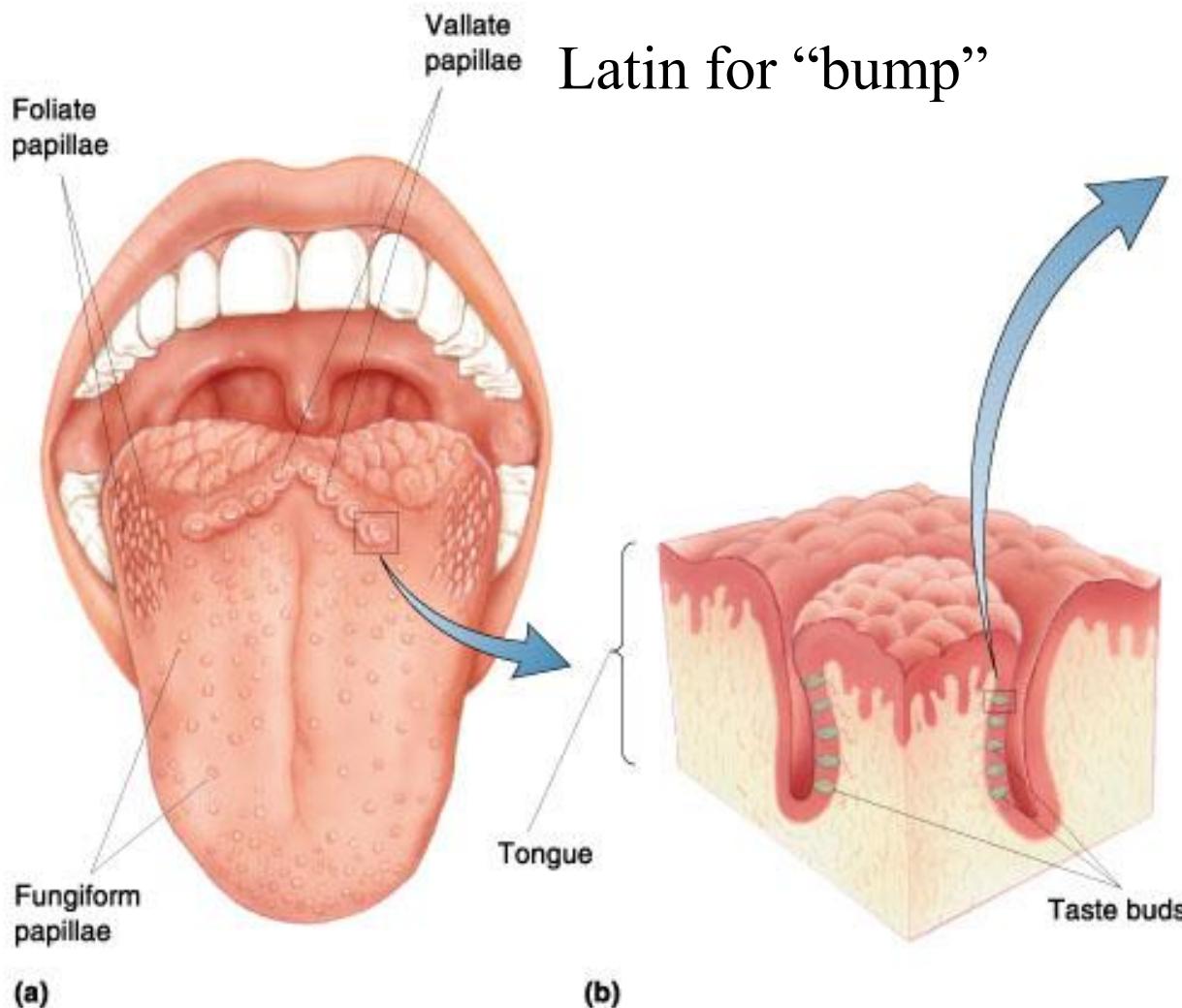
\*Most of the tongue is sensitive to all tastes



\*The tongue is most sensitive to these basic tastes in certain regions

Figure 8.3

The tongue, its papillae, and its taste buds. (a) Papillae are the taste-sensitive structures. The largest and most posterior are the vallate papillae. Foliate papillae are elongated. Fungiform papillae are relatively large toward the back of the tongue and much smaller along the sides and tip. (b) Cross-sectional view of a vallate papilla showing the locations of taste buds. (c) A taste bud is a cluster of taste cells (receptor cells), gustatory afferent axons and their synapses with taste cells, and basal cells. Microvilli at the apical end of the taste cells extend into the taste pore, the site where chemicals dissolved in saliva can interact directly with taste cells.



# Taste

## ► The Tongue

- Papillae—each one has several hundred taste buds—each having 50-150 receptor cells
- An average person has 2000-5000 taste buds, although super-tasters have as many as 20,000. and then there are the sorry bunch who only have 500

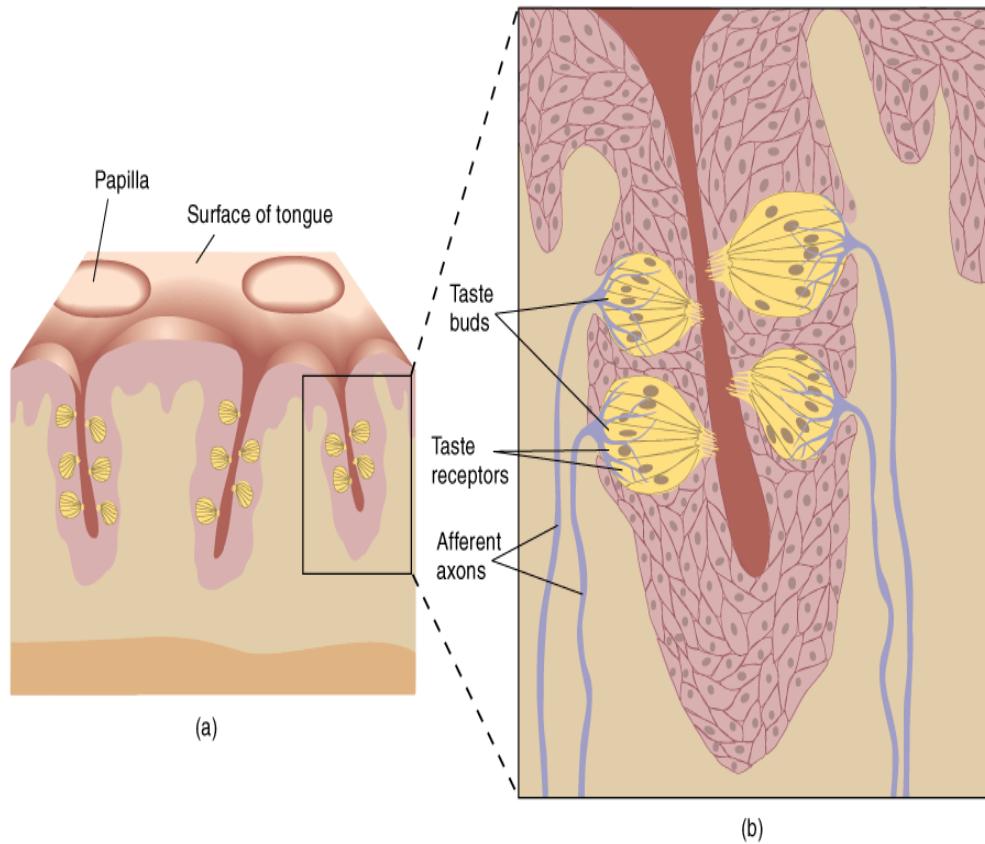
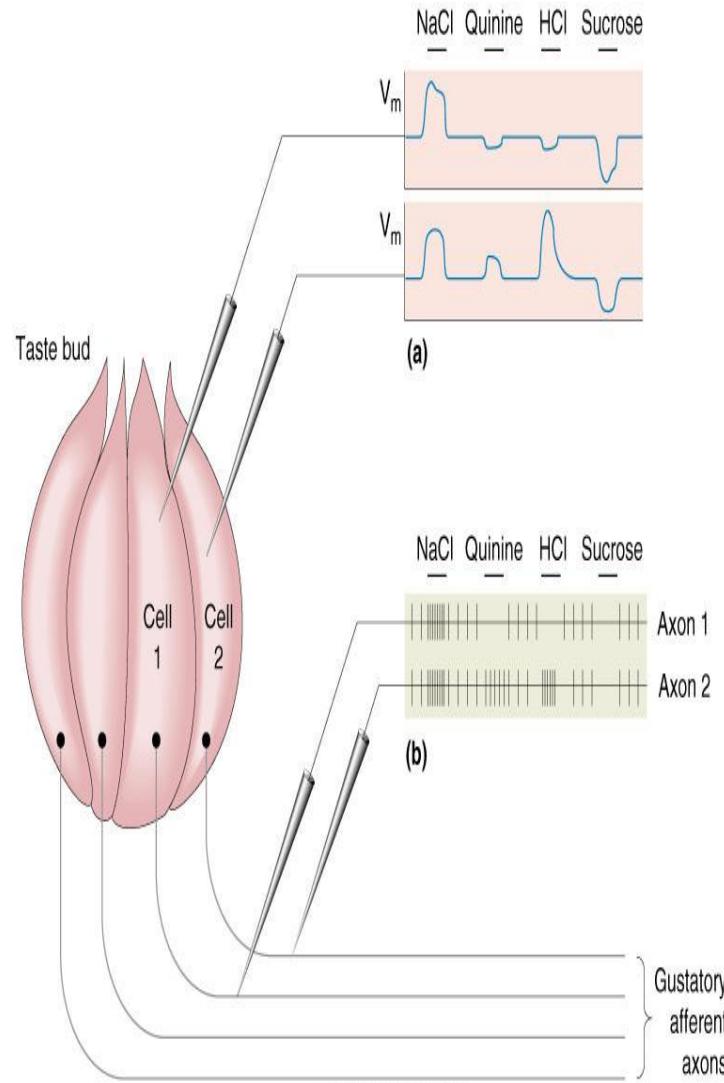


Figure 8.4

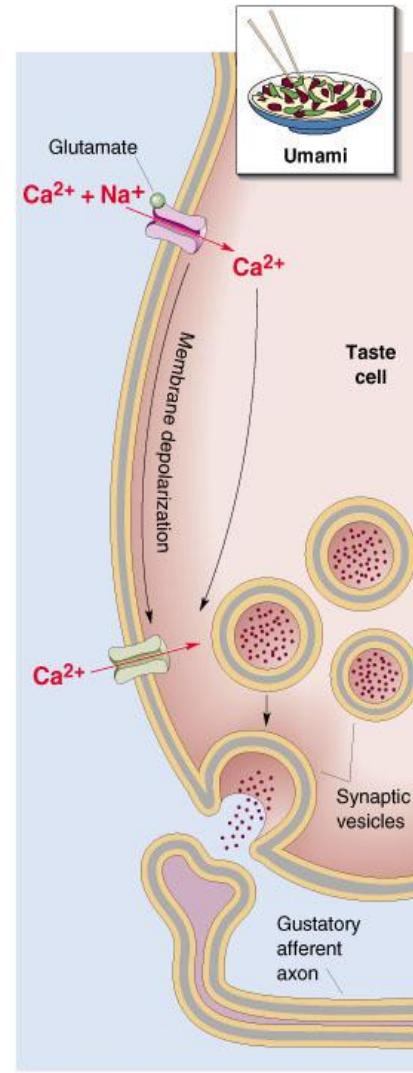
Responsiveness of taste cells and gustatory axons. (a) Two different cells were exposed to salt (NaCl), bitter (quinine), sour (HCl), and sweet (sucrose) stimuli, and their membrane potential was recorded with electrodes. Notice the different sensitivities of the two cells. (b) In this case, the action potential discharge of the sensory axons was recorded. This is an example of extracellular recording of action potentials. Each vertical deflection in the record is a single action potential.



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Figure 8.9

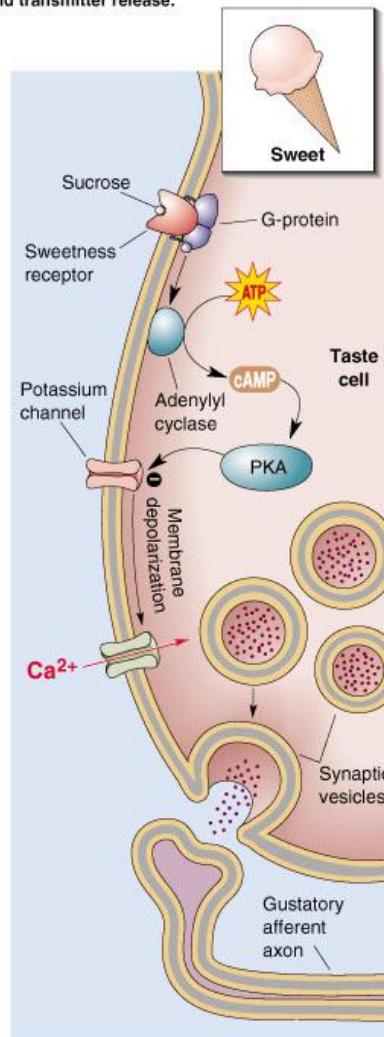
Transduction mechanisms for umami tastants (glutamate). Some amino acid tastants can bind to a cation-permeable channel, leading to a change in membrane current and potential, hence the direct entry of  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$ .



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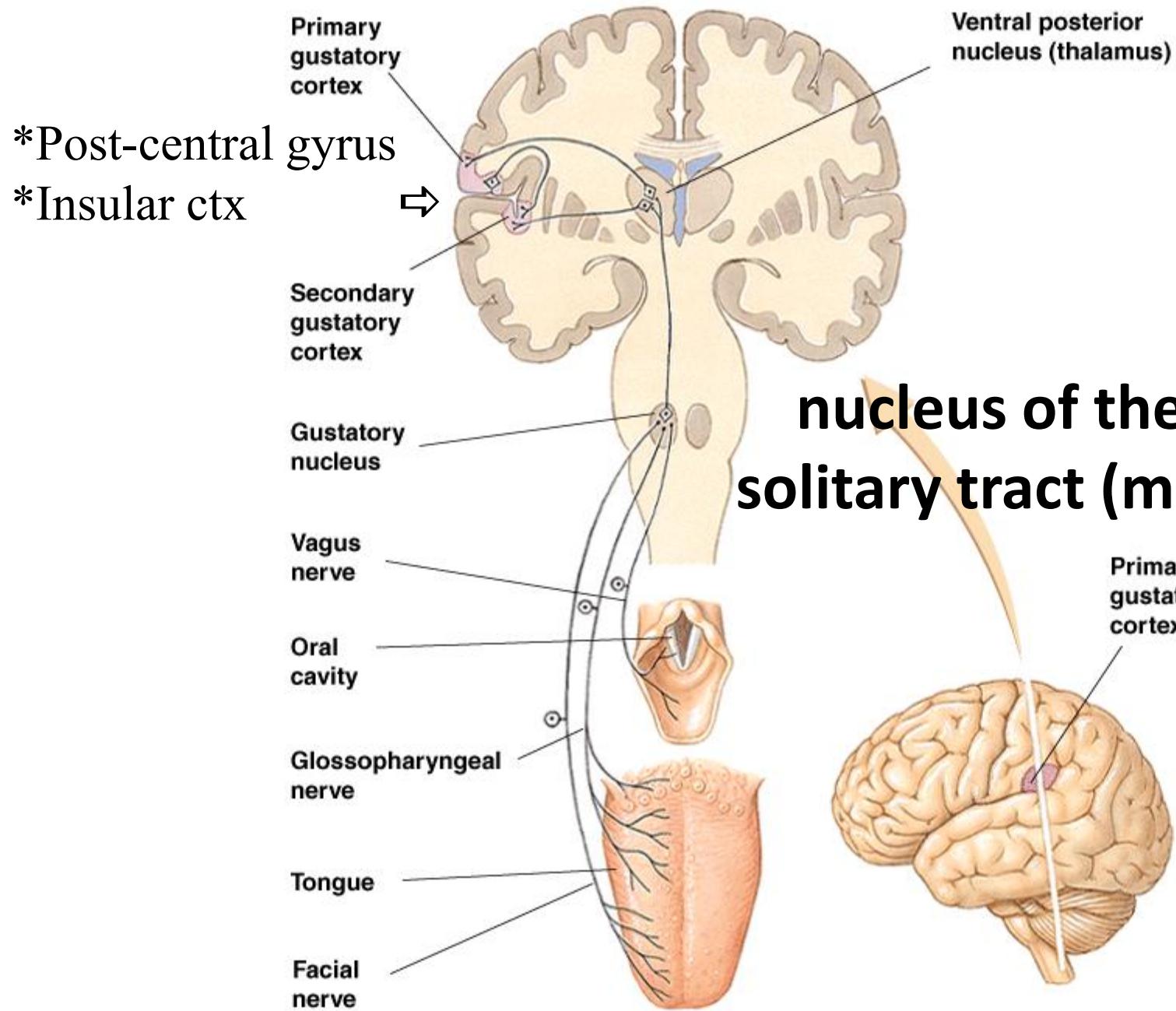
Figure 8.7

Transduction mechanisms for sweet tastants. Tastants bind directly to G-protein-coupled membrane receptors and trigger the synthesis of cAMP, which leads to the blockade of a potassium channel, depolarization,  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  entry, and transmitter release.



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## ► The Gustatory System



# Where does that gourmet flavor come from?

- The color, texture, aroma, expectations, temperature, and satiety all play a role in the perception of taste along with the direct activation of the primary tastes
- Smell and taste are us. Secondary to visual capture
- Ill-colored food tastes, “just not right”
- Lumpy mashed potatoes, soggy bacon, celery, or carrots, smoothness of grapes
- Lack of smell make it difficult to distinguish a bite of an apple vs. an onion

# Capsaicin

- The active ingredient in spicy food
- Releases substance P from certain nociceptors in the mouth
- Substance P is a peptide synthesized by nociceptors (pain) that causes vasodilation and release of histamine and hyperalgesia (super sensitivity to pain)
- Be forewarned about the searing pain that comes from rubbing your eyes with chili-stained (capsaicin-coated) fingers

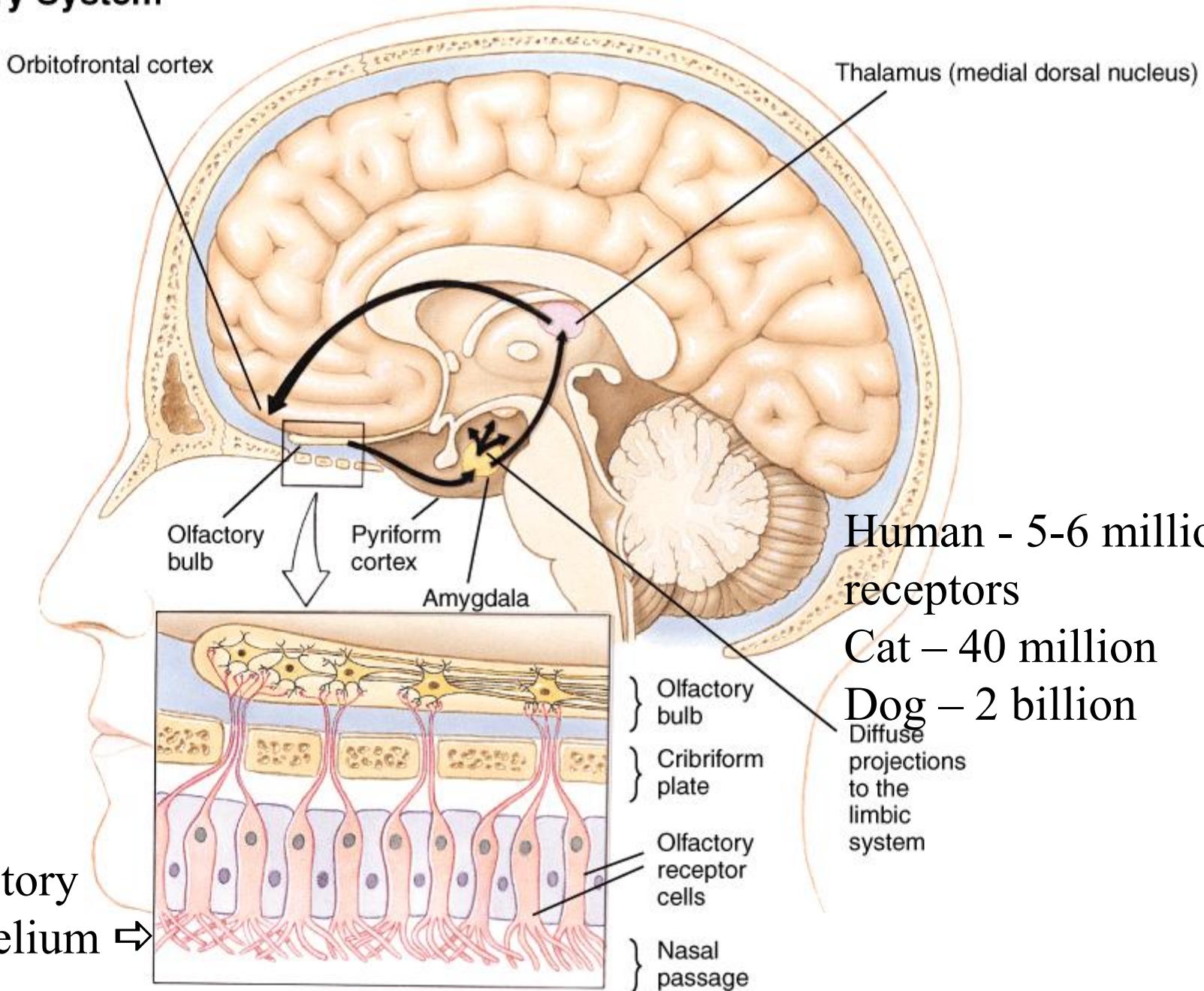
# Smell--Olfaction

- We can smell and differentiate between several hundred thousand substances, only about 20% are pleasant and only ~ 16-20 are identifiable
- Anosmia - Odor blindness
- Women are slightly better than men in both detecting and identifying odors
- The ability to detect odors declines somewhat with age
- Smokers show a dulled sense of smell (they found pleasant odors to be less pleasant and unpleasant odors to be less unpleasant)

# Smell--Olfaction

- The olfactory system begins in the roof of the nasal cavity
- Olfactory receptors are ciliated epithelial cells capable of detecting thousands of different odors
- Axons from the olfactory receptors project through the cribiform plate and synapse on dendrites of mitral cells in the olfactory bulb
- There is no **direct** projection to the thalamus
- Primary olfactory cortex – ventral anterior temporal lobe (ipsilateral projections fr. Ea. Nostril detect changes in odor)
- Secondary cortex – lateral orbitofrontal ctx. (identifying smell)

## ► Olfactory System



# Smell--Olfaction

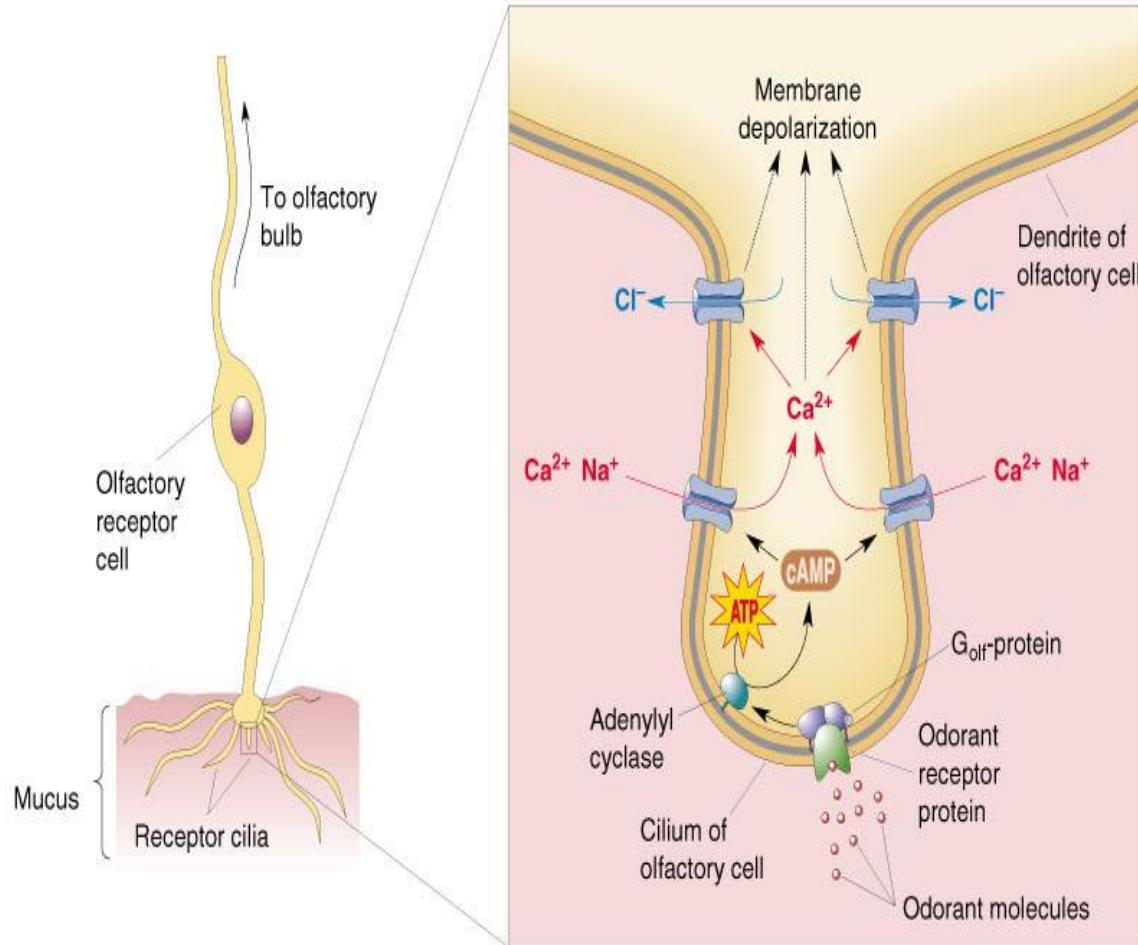
- Olfactory receptors continually die and regenerate in a cycle that lasts about 1-3 months.
- Mucus (snot) covers the epithelium, flows constantly & is replaced every 10 min. (contains antibodies to protect from Virus; provides moisture and removes foreign material from inspired air)

# Transduction

- Occurs in the cilia: binding of odorants
  - odorant binds to receptor
  - activates cAMP
  - influx of  $\text{Na}^+$  and  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$

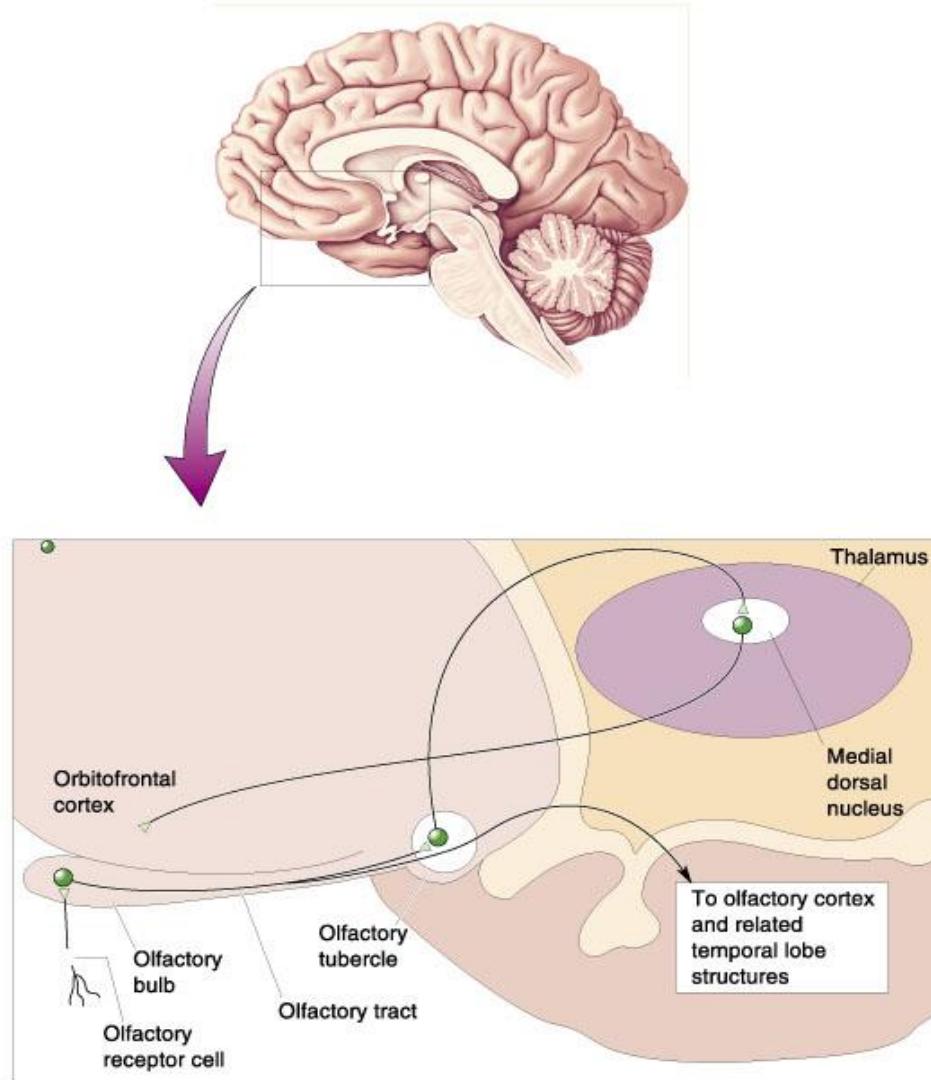
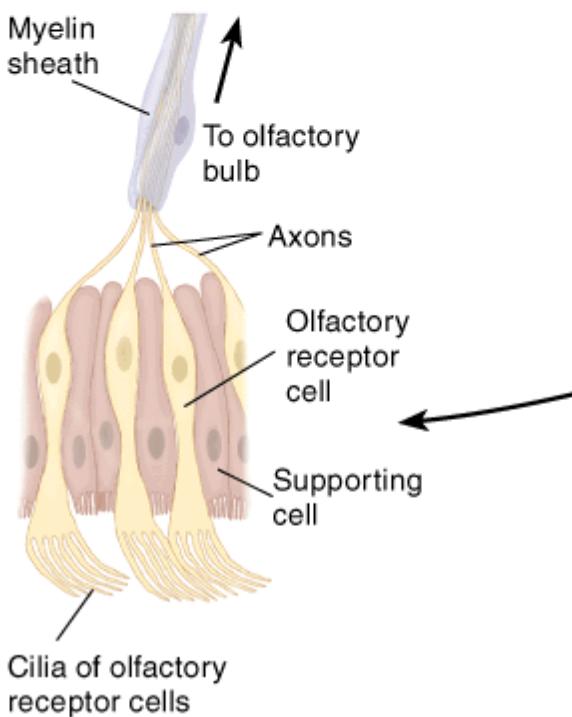
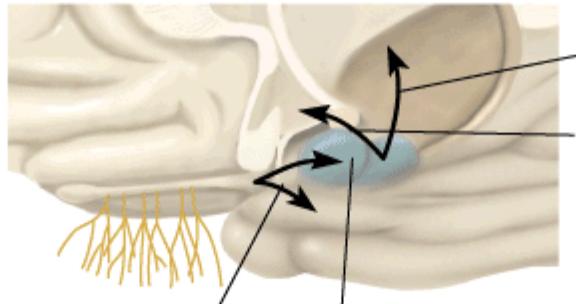
Figure 8.12

Transduction mechanisms of vertebrate olfactory receptor cells. This drawing shows a single cilium of an olfactory receptor cell and the signaling molecules of olfactory transduction that it contains. G<sub>olf</sub> is a special form of G-protein found only in olfactory receptor cells.



# ► The Olfactory System

**Figure 8.19**  
Central olfactory pathways. Axons of the olfactory tract branch and enter many regions of the forebrain, including the olfactory cortex. The neocortex is reached only by a pathway that synapses in the medial dorsal nucleus of the thalamus.



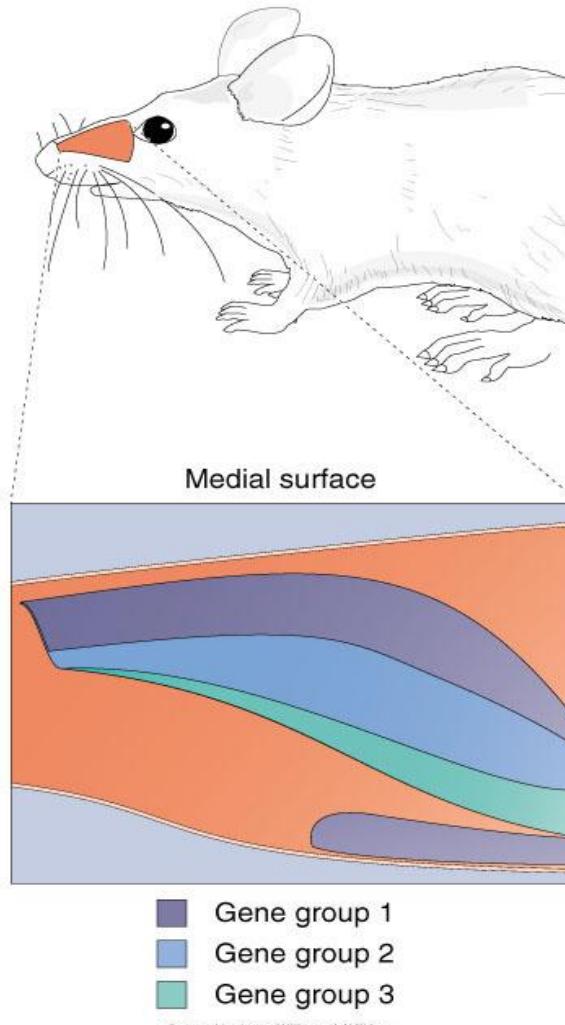
**Piriform ctx – 1<sup>st</sup> perception of odor**

**Orbitofrontal ctx. – conscious perception or identification of odor**

**Limbic system – emotional, appetitive, and reproductive aspects of odor**

Figure 8.14

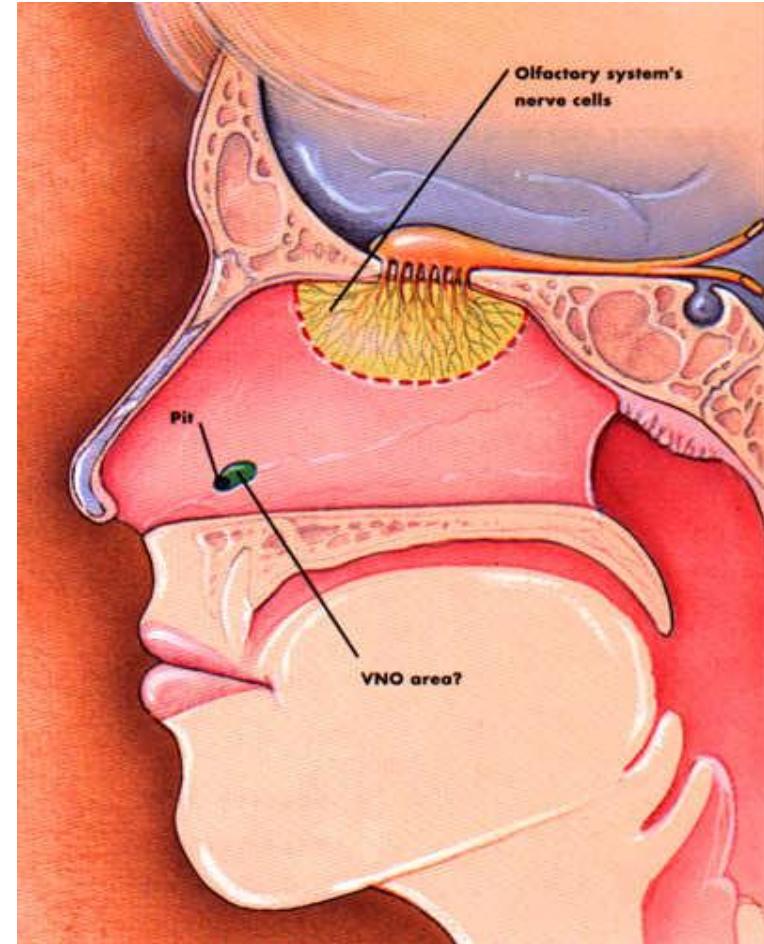
Maps of the expression of different olfactory receptor proteins on the olfactory epithelium of a mouse. Three groups of genes were mapped in this case, and each had a separate nonoverlapping zone of distribution. (Source: Adapted from Ressler et al., 1993, p. 602.)



# PHEROMONES

- \* Airborne chemicals released from animals that have a physiological or behavioral effect on another
- Vomeronasal organ (VMO) – ventromedial Hyp.

\*While the potency may not compare to the insect system, investigators are beginning to find evidence that many mammals ranging from pigs to elephants can have a pheromone-type response to a sniff of secretions. Yes, even humans appear to respond.



# PHEROMONES

- McClintock Effect – synchronization of menstrual cycles in women who live together -
  - Cotton pads underneath the arms of donor women (8hrs.) and then wiped underneath the noses of recipient women (did not wash face for 6 hrs.)
  - The recipients were not told the source of the chemicals and did not consciously perceive any odors
  - Recipient's menstrual cycle either shortened or lengthened
- Researchers have found that female rodents share the same characteristic. Furthermore, chemicals emitted from a female rat during one part of its reproductive cycle will lengthen a fellow rodent's cycle. Chemicals from another part of the cycle will shorten the cycle.

# PHEROMONES

(Carlson, p. 270)

- Isolated on a remote island for several weeks, a scientist notes that his beard sprouts at a pathetic rate. Back in the company of women, his whisker growth returns to a gallop.
- Male moths will detect the spray of a fertile female as far as a mile away. The pheromone causes them to drop all business and meet the female for mating.
- Bloodhounds have difficulty distinguishing between the smells of identical twins, but not fraternal siblings
- Bruce Effect – a recently impregnated female mouse will abort fetus if encountered by a male mouse other than the one with which she mated

# Synesthesia

- The capacity to join sensory experiences across sensory modalities
- 1:25,000 people (Cytowic, 1988)
- Nabokov
- Genetic component undetermined
- Tasting shapes, colored hearing (speech and music have color),