

# Functions of the Brain Stem

**Dr Syed Shahid Habib**

*Professor & Consultant Clinical Neurophysiology*

*Dept. of Physiology*

*King Saud University*

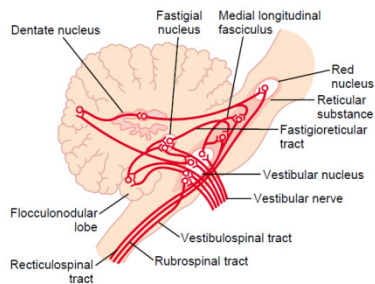


Figure 55-13

Connections of vestibular nerves through the vestibular nuclei (the large oval white area) with other areas of the central nervous system.

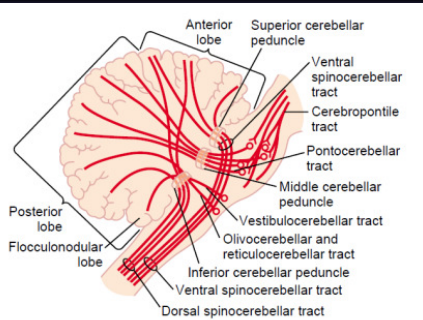


Figure 56-4

Principal afferent tracts to the cerebellum.

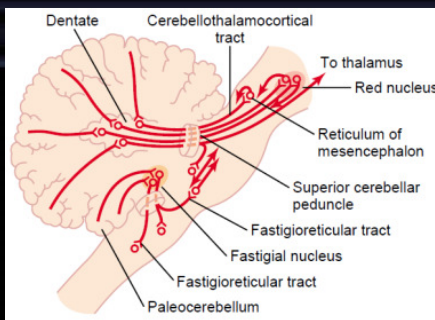


Figure 56-6

Principal efferent tracts from the cerebellum.

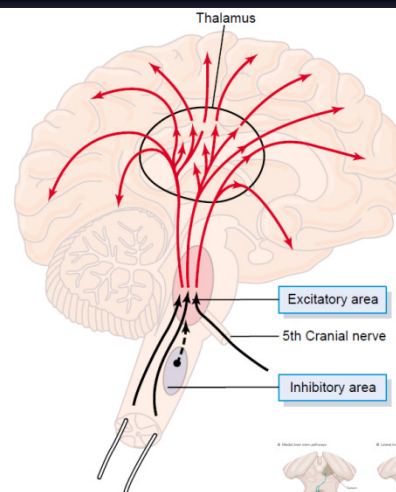


Figure 58-1

Excitatory-activating system of the brain. Inhibitory area in the medulla that can activate the system.

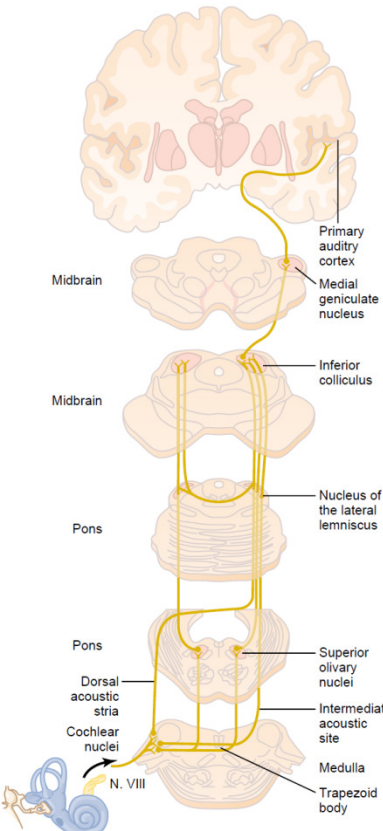


Figure 52-10

Auditory nervous pathways. (Modified from Brodal A: The auditory system. In Neurological Anatomy in Relation to Clinical Medicine, 3rd ed. New York: Oxford University Press, 1981.)

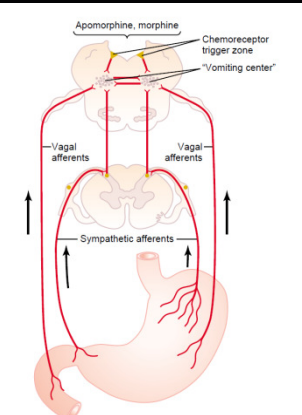


Figure 66-2

Neural connections of the "vomiting center." This so-called vomiting center includes multiple sensory, motor, and control nuclei mainly in the medullary and pontile reticular formation but also extending into the spinal cord.

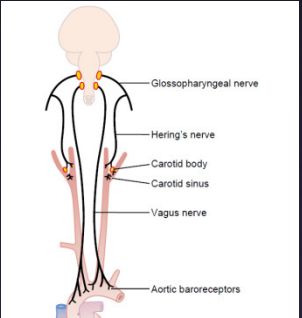


Figure 19-5

The baroreceptor system for controlling blood pressure.

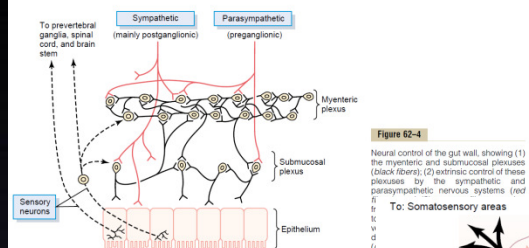


Figure 62-4

Neural control of the gut wall, showing (1) the myenteric and submucosal plexuses (black fibers); (2) autonomic control of these plexuses by the sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous systems (red fibers).

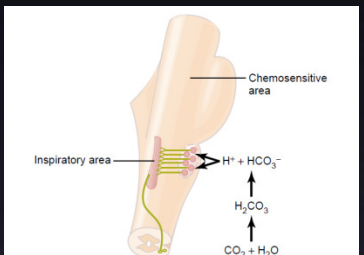


Figure 41-2

Stimulation of the brain stem respiratory area by signals from the chemosensitive area located bilaterally in the medulla, lying only a fraction of a millimeter beneath the ventral medullary surface. Note also that hydrogen ions stimulate the chemosensitive area, but carbon dioxide in the fluid gives rise to most of the hydrogen ions.

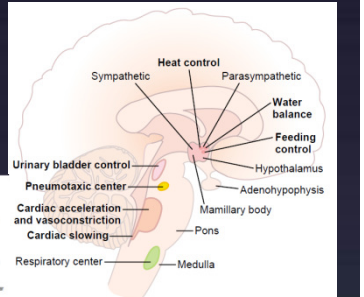


Figure 60-5

Autonomic control areas in the brain stem and hypothalamus.

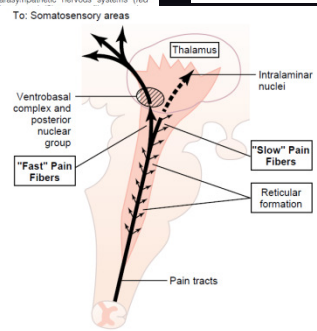


Figure 48-4

Analgesia system of the brain and spinal cord, showing (1) inhibition of incoming pain signals at the cord level and (2) presence of enkephalin-secreting neurons that suppress pain signals in both the cord and the brain stem.

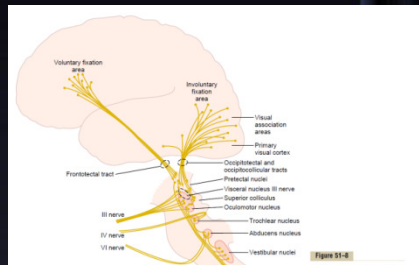


Figure 53-2

Transmission of taste signals into the central nervous system.

# OBJECTIVES

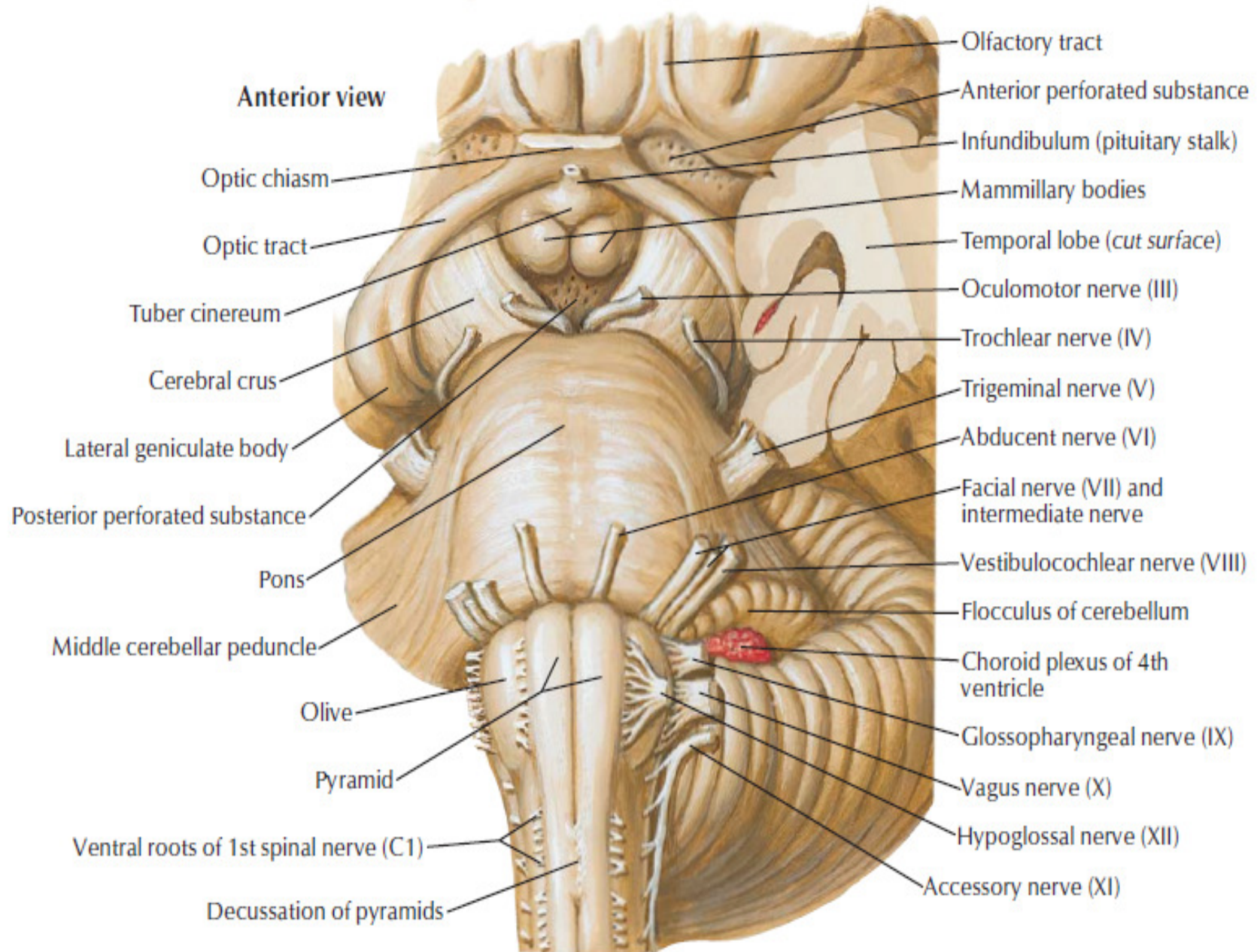
**At the end of this lecture the student should be able to :**

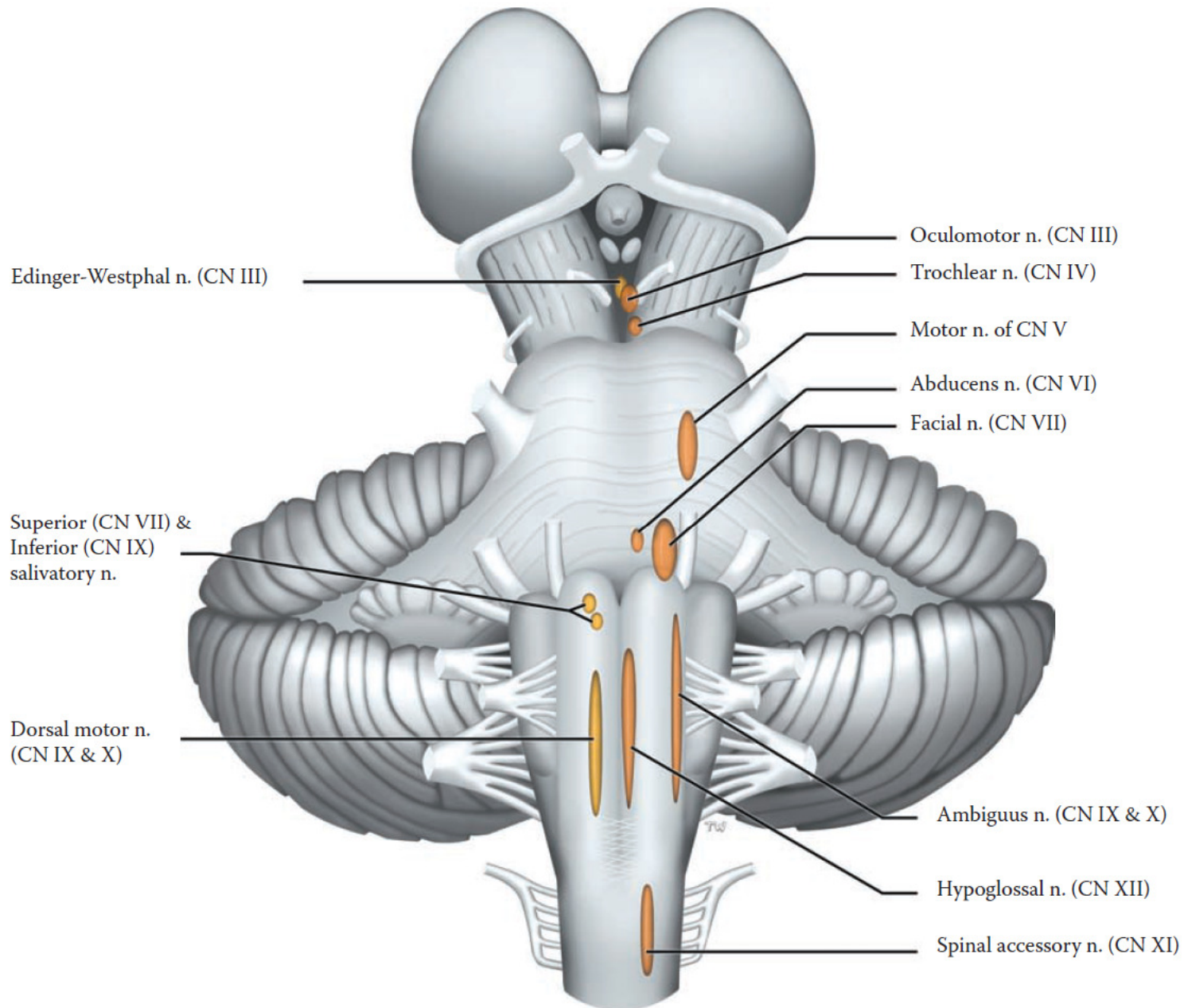
- *Enumerate Components of Brain stem*
- *List Important structures in brain stem*
- *Describe Functions of the Brain Stem*
- *Describe Signs & Symptoms of brain stem lesion*
- *Understand brain stem function tests*

## A sample Case

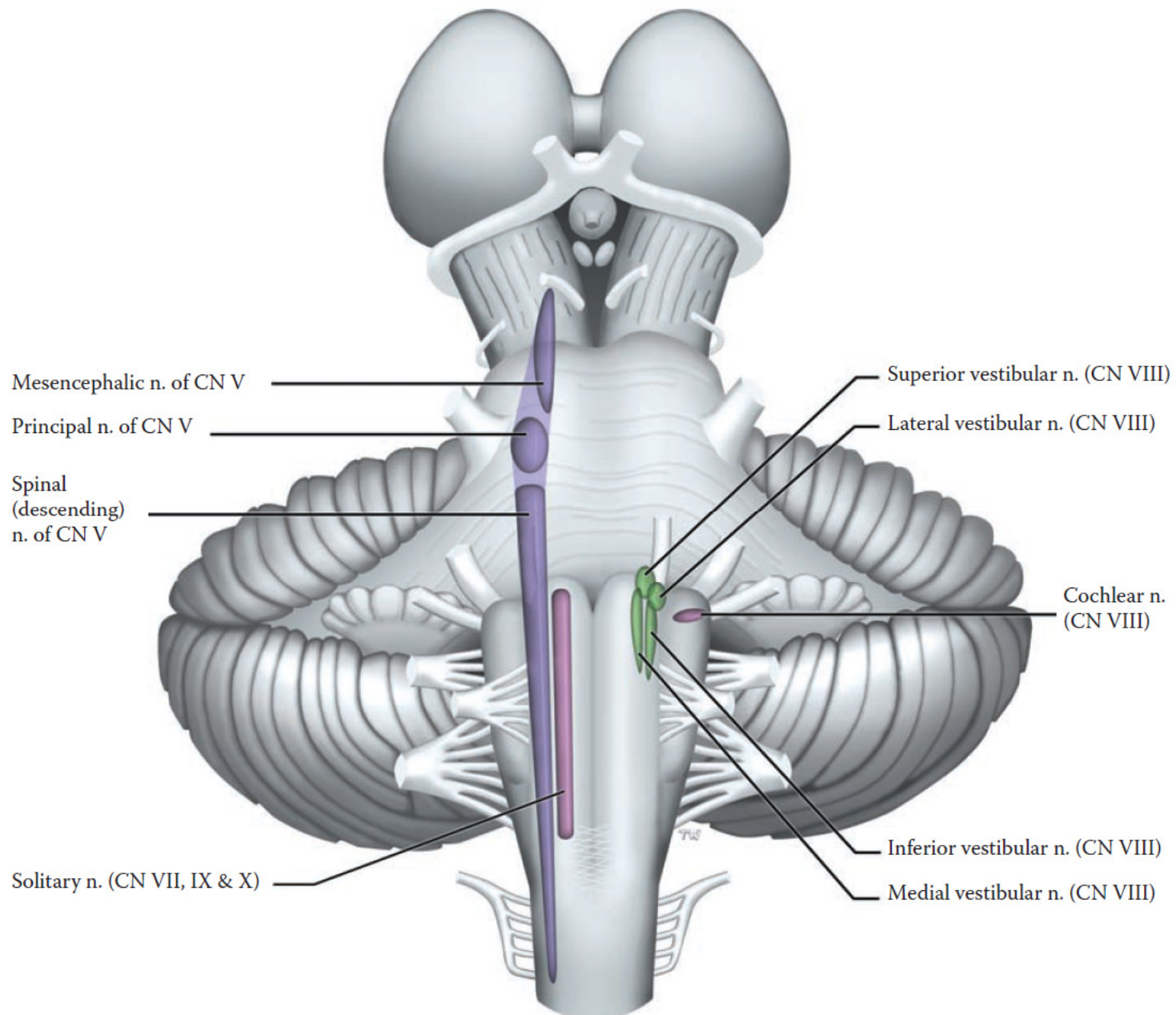
A 58 y/o was referred to you because of recent onset of left hemiparesis, left-sided loss of proprioception and right-sided tongue deviation. What CNS structures are affected?

Explain the symptoms with regards to structures affected.  
Where is the lesion?





**FIGURE 8A: Brainstem 3 — Cranial Nerves Nuclei — Motor**



**FIGURE 8B: Brainstem 4 — Cranial Nerves Nuclei — Sensory**

# Functions of the Brain Stem

Though it is small, brain stem is an extremely important part of the brain:

1. A Conduct structure (way station) .
2. Provides the origin of the cranial nerves (CN III-XII).
3. **Conjugate eye movement** motor coordination of the eyes that allows for bilateral fixation on any object.
4. Many many Integrative functions.



## **Role of the Brain Stem in Controlling Motor Functions**

1. Control of respiration
2. Control of the cardiovascular system
3. Partial control of gastrointestinal function
4. Control of many stereotyped movements of the body
5. Control of equilibrium
6. Control of eye movements

## Brain Stem Motor Functions (cont.)

- Brain stem serves as a **way station** for “command signals” from higher neural centers.
- The **autonomic nervous system** is activated mainly by centers located in the spinal cord, brain stem, and hypothalamus (Cardiovascular Gastrointestinal Autonomic Reflexes.)
- Functions of Brain Stem Nuclei in **Controlling Subconscious, Stereotyped Movements** (anencephaly)
- Motor branch of the fifth cranial nerve, and the **chewing** process is controlled by nuclei in the brain stem and also **swallowing, salivary secretion, vomiting** (chemoreceptor trigger zone)
- The actual mechanics of feeding are controlled by centers in the brain stem.
- **Vasomotor center** for CV control (Baroreceptors) in medulla
- Brain stem **Neurohormonal Systems** in the human brain for activating four neurohormonal systems
- Many of the **behavioral functions** elicited from the hypothalamus and other limbic structures are also mediated through the reticular nuclei in the brain stem and their associated nuclei.

## Brain Stem Motor Functions (cont.)

- Although the **micturition reflex** is an autonomic spinal cord reflex, it can also be inhibited or facilitated by centers in the cerebral cortex or brain stem in pons
- **Accommodation** Is Controlled by Parasympathetic Nerves by 3<sup>rd</sup> CN
- Neural Pathways for Control of **Eye Movements**. also shows brain stem nuclei for the third, fourth, and sixth cranial nerves by medial longitudinal fasciculus
- **Auditory Nervous Pathways** → superior olivary nucleus
- Nucleus of tractus solitarius → **Taste pathway** → Sup & Inf Salivatory Nuclei
- Bulboreticular facilitatory area of brain stem for **gamma efferent system** (stabilizes joints)
- Control of Cerebral Activity by Continuous Excitatory Signals from the Brain Stem (**Reticular Excitatory Area of the Brain Stem** → bulboreticular facilitatory area → it is the same brain stem reticular area that transmits facilitatory signals downward to the spinal cord to maintain tone in the antigravity muscles and to control levels of activity of the spinal cord reflexes.

# 1. Conduct functions (way station)

All information related from the body to the cerebrum and cerebellum and vice versa, must traverse the brain stem.

a) The ascending sensory pathways coming from the body to the brain includes:

- The spinothalamin tract for pain and temperature sensation.
- The dorsal column, fasciculus gracilis, and cuneatus for touch, proprioceptive and pressure sensation.

b) Descending tracts

- The corticospinal tract (UMN): runs through the crus cerebri, the basal part of the pons and the medullary pyramids; 70-90 % of fibers cross in the pyramidal decussation to form the lateral corticospinal tract, destined to synapse on lower motor neurons in the ventral horn of the spinal cord.

▪ Upper motor neurons that originate in the brain stem's vestibular, red, and reticular nuclei, which also descend and synapse in the spinal cord.

# Origin & functions of the cranial nerves

## From midbrain

- CN III (oculomotor)
- CN IV (trochlear)

Both moves eyes; CN III constricts the pupils, accommodates.

## From pons

- CN V (trigeminal): Chews and feels front of the head.
- CN VI (abducens): Moves eyes.
- CN VII (facial): Moves the face, tastes, salivates, cries.
- CN VIII (acoustic): Hears, regulates balance.

## From medulla

- CN IX (glossopharyngeal): Tastes, salivates, swallows, monitors carotid body and sinus.
- CN X (vagus): Tastes, swallows, lifts palate, talks, communication to and from thoraco-abdominal viscera.
- CN XI (accessory): Turns head, lifts shoulder.
- CN XII (hypoglossal): Moves tongue.

# INTEGRATIVE FUNCTIONS

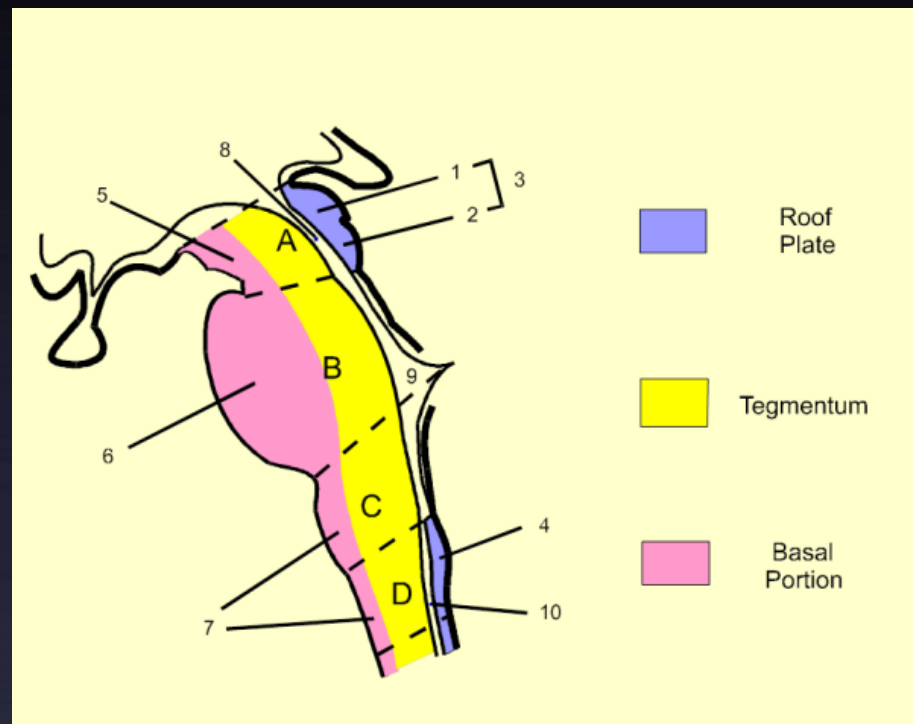
- It controls **consciousness & sleep cycle** (alertness and arousal) through reticular formation.
- It has got center for **cardiovascular, respiratory & autonomic nervous system**.
- It has centers for **cough, gag, swallowing and vomiting**.
- Sense of body **balance** (Vestibular functions)
- Substantia nigra which is a part of the basal ganglia is present in midbrain and is involved in **control of movements**.
- Midbrain also contain red nucleus which regulate the motor activity through cerebellum.
- Inferior and superior colliculi are situated on the dorsal surface of the midbrain and is involved in **auditory & visual processing** required for head movements.
- **Pain sensitivity control**: Periaqueductal grey matter of mesencephalon is an area which is rich in endogenous opioid and is important in modulation of painful stimuli.

# FUNCTIONAL ORGANIZATION OF THE BRAIN STEM

- Ventral layer of brainstem is **motor** in function.
- Middle layer is **sensory** in function & contains medial lemniscus which conveys sensory information from dorsal column.

## Basic Structure of Brain Stem

1. Roof Plate
2. Tegmentum
3. Basal Portion



# Functions of Midbrain

- Nerve pathway to cerebral hemispheres.
- Auditory and Visual reflex centers.
- Cranial Nerves:
  - CN III - Oculomotor [motor]. (Related to eye movement).
  - CN IV - Trochlear [motor]. (Superior oblique muscle of the eye which rotates the eye down and out).

## Signs & Symptoms of midbrain lesion

CN (Cranial Nerve) Deficits: Ipsilateral CN III, CN IV palsy and ptosis (drooping).

Pupils:           Size: Midposition to dilated.

                      Reactivity: Sluggish to fixed.

Movement: Abnormal extensor.

Respiratory: Hyperventilating.

Loss of consciousness (LOC): Varies



# Functions of pons

- Respiratory Center.
- Cranial Nerves:
  - CN V - Trigeminal [motor and sensory]. (Skin of face, tongue, teeth; muscle of mastication).
  - CN VI - Abducens [motor]. (Lateral rectus muscle of eye which rotates eye outward).
  - CN VII - Facial [motor and sensory]. (Muscles of expression).
  - CN VIII - Acoustic [sensory]. (Hearing)

## Signs & Symptoms of pons lesion

- Pupils size: Pinpoint
- LOC: Semi-coma
- Movement: Abnormal extensor.
- Respiratory: -Apneustic (Abnormal respiration marked by sustained inhalation). -Hyperventilation.
- CN Deficits: CN V, CN VI, CN VII, CN VIII.

# Functions of medulla oblongata

- **Crossing of motor tracts.**
- **Cardiac Center.**
- **Respiratory Center.**
- **Vasomotor Center (nerves having muscular control of the blood vessel walls)**
- **Centers for cough, gag, swallow, and vomit.**
- **Cranial Nerves:**
  - CN IX - Glossopharyngeal [mixed]. (Muscles & mucous membranes of pharynx, the constricted openings from the mouth & the oral pharynx and the posterior third of tongue).
  - CN X - Vagus [mixed]. (Pharynx, larynx, heart, lungs, stomach).
  - CN XI - Accessory [motor]. (Rotation of the head and shoulder).
  - CN XII - Hypoglossal [motor]. (Intrinsic muscles of the tongue).

## Signs and symptoms of lesion in medulla

- Movement: Ipsilateral paralysis.
- Pupils:           Size: Dilated.   Reactivity: Fixed.
- Respiratory: Abnormal breathing patterns
- CN Palsies: Inability to control movement. Absent cough, gag.
- LOC: Comatose.

# Brain Stem Function Tests

☞ **To test reticular formation**

Alertness, Consciousness & Sleep.

☞ **Corticospinal tract**

Motor power, reflexes

☞ **Pain response**

Facial grimacing on firm pressure over the supra orbital ridge.

☞ **To test respiratory center**

look for the normal pattern of respiration

**☞ To test cardiovascular functions**

**Look for normal circulatory function**

**☞ To test brainstem reflexes:**

- **Pupillary and corneal reflexes.**
- **Vestibulo-ocular reflex: Injection of iced water into the ear will produce eyes movement.**
- **Oculo-cephalic reflex: Eyes will be fixed when head is moved in one or another directions.**
- **Gag reflex.**
- **Cough reflex**

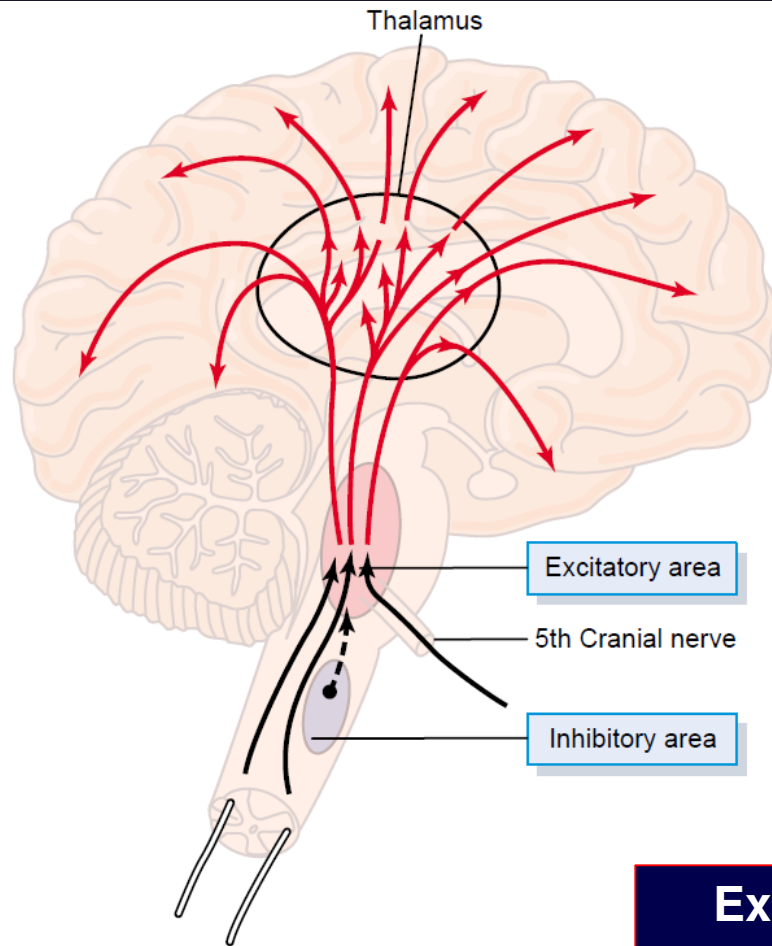


Figure 58-1

*Excitatory-activating system of the brain. Also shown is an inhibitory area in the medulla that can inhibit or depress the activating system.*

## Excitation of the Excitatory Area by Peripheral Sensory Signals.

**A Reticular Inhibitory Area Located in the Lower Brain Stem**

## Neurohormonal Systems in the Human Brain. Brain stem areas in the human brain for activating four neurohormonal systems,

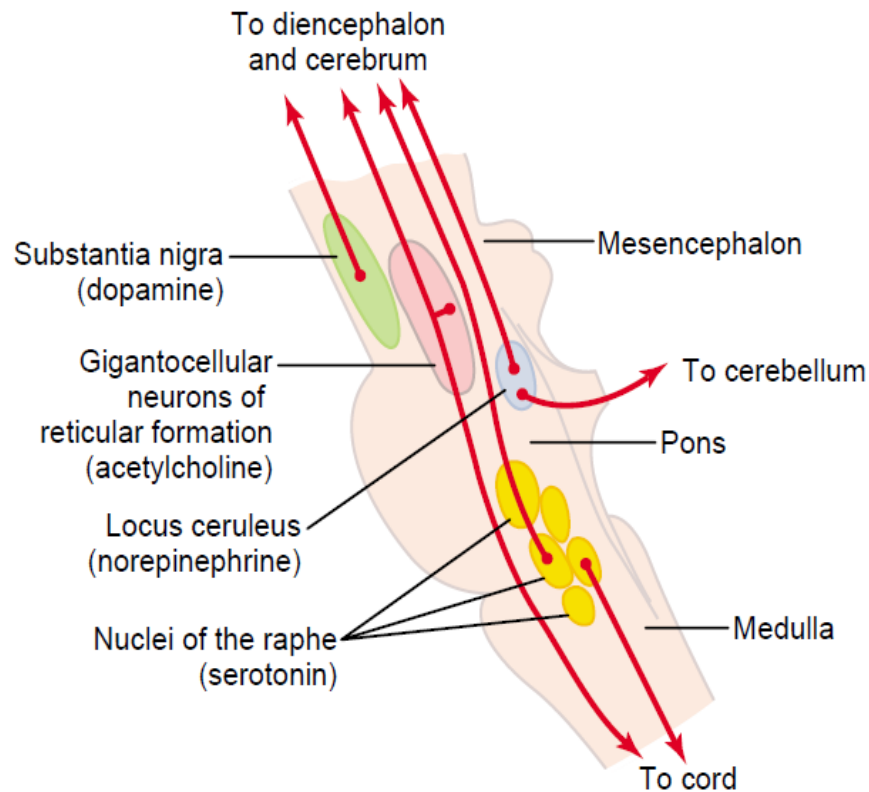


Figure 58-3

Multiple centers in the brain stem, the neurons of which secrete different transmitter substances (specified in parentheses). These neurons send control signals upward into the diencephalon and cerebrum and downward into the spinal cord.

1. *The locus ceruleus and the norepinephrine system.* important role in causing dreaming, thus leading to a type of sleep called rapid eye movement sleep (*REM sleep*).

2. *The substantia nigra and the dopamine system.*

3. *The raphe nuclei and the serotonin system.* At Cord suppress pain and in higher centers cause normal sleep

4. *The gigantocellular neurons of the reticular excitatory area and the acetylcholine system.*

Activation of these acetylcholine neurons leads to an acutely awake and excited nervous system.

58 year old woman  
•Left hemiparesis  
•Left-sided loss of proprioception  
•Right-sided tongue deviation

•Motor (CS tract, R)  
•Medial lemniscus, R  
•CN12, R

•Medial  
•Medial  
•Medulla  
Medial medullary syndrome (R)

•Motor (CS tract, R)  
•Medial lemniscus, R  
•CN12, R  
Vertebral artery, medullary branch (R)