PsychPrep

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Biopsychology at a Glance

A-level Psychology
AQA 7182 Paper 2 · Biopsychology

Sample factfile

IN A NUTSHELL How does the brain shape behaviour, and what keeps our body clocks in time? Biopsychology is Section B of Paper 2. Here are the key structures, studies and rhythms on one page.

1 Key terms

Synapse
gap between neurons

Localisation
functions in specific areas

Plasticity
brain changes with experience

Zeitgeber
external time cue

2 Systems and neurons

- Nervous system: CNS (brain, spinal cord) and PNS (somatic, autonomic). Fight or flight: hypothalamus, sympathetic branch, adrenaline from the adrenal medulla.
- Neurons: sensory, relay, motor. Synaptic transmission: vesicles, synaptic cleft, receptors; excitation and inhibition.

3 The brain

- Localisation: motor, somatosensory, visual, auditory; Broca's area (speech production) and Wernicke's area (comprehension).
- Split brain: Sperry (1968). Plasticity: Maguire et al. (2000), 16 taxi drivers. Recovery: axonal sprouting, homologous areas.

4 Studying the brain

- fMRI: blood oxygen, good spatial resolution. EEG and ERP: electrical activity, good temporal resolution.
- Post-mortem: Broca's patient Tan (1861).

5 Biological rhythms

- Circadian: Siffre (1962), two months in a cave. Infradian: menstrual cycle; Stern and McClintock (1998). Ultradian: sleep stages, about 90 minutes.
- SCN in the hypothalamus; melatonin from the pineal gland; light and social cues as zeitgebers.

6 Exam tip

Learn the visual fields: the left visual field goes to the right hemisphere. It is the most common error in split-brain answers.

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