WEEK 11

NEUROEPIGENETICS II

Neuroepigenetics

1) **The chromatin – Epigenetic basics (Lecture 1)**

   - Chromatin condensation
   - Regulation of chromatin structure
   - Environmental influences on epigenetics
   - Epigenetic inheritance

2) **Epigenetic dysregulation (Lecture 2)**

   - in AD

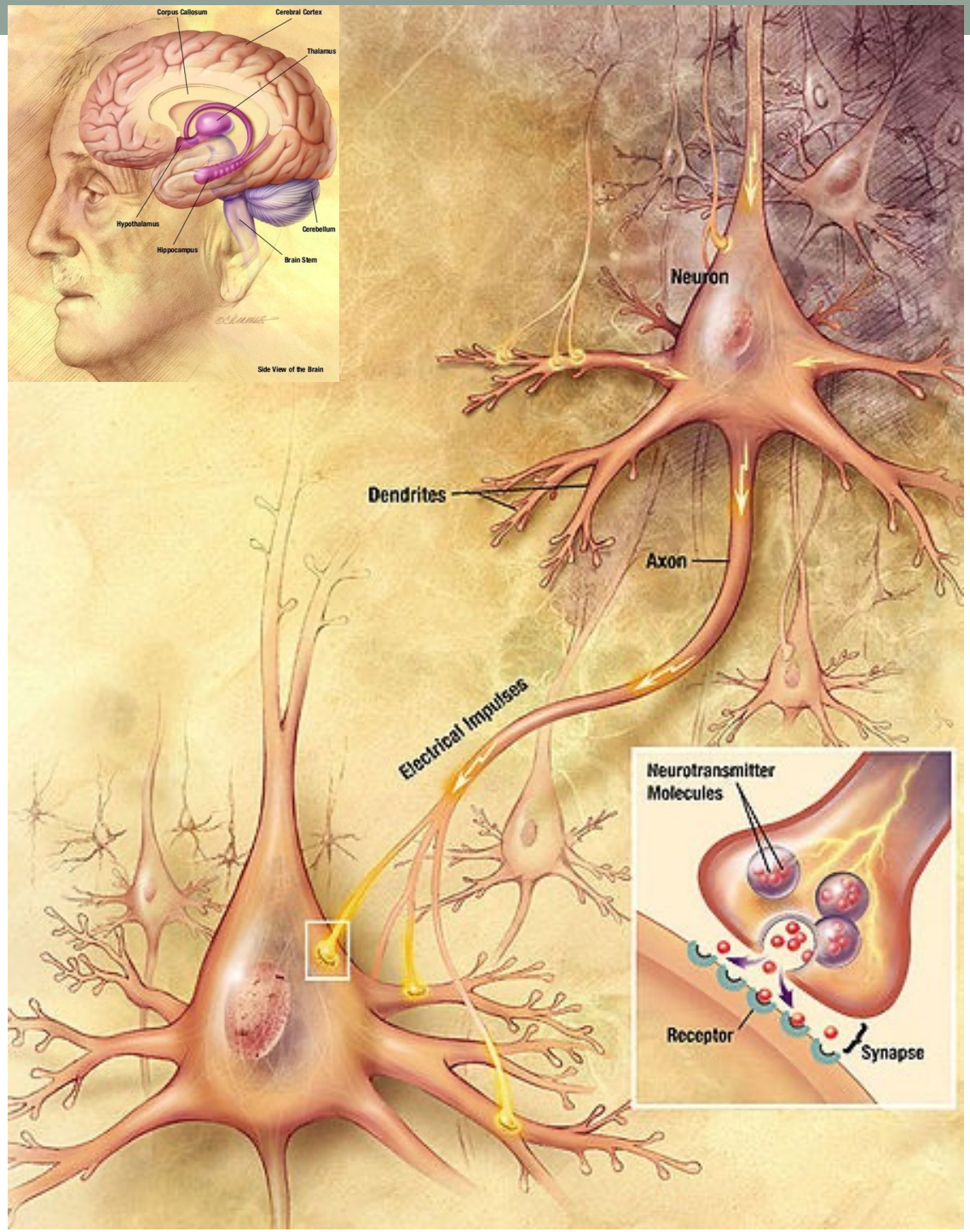
Learning objectives

At the end of today you will be up to date with

- How histone acetylation contributes to learning and memory
- How dysregulated histone acetylation contributes to cognitive decline in AD
- The concept of “cognitive epigenetic priming”, or how HDAC inhibitors work to improve cognition


Damage
ChIP
Water-Maze
Neurotoxic
Braak
H202
Priming
Single-cell
shRNA
HDACi
GR
HDAC2
Luciferase

What is memory?



Epigenetic memory?

How to **strengthen memory** ?

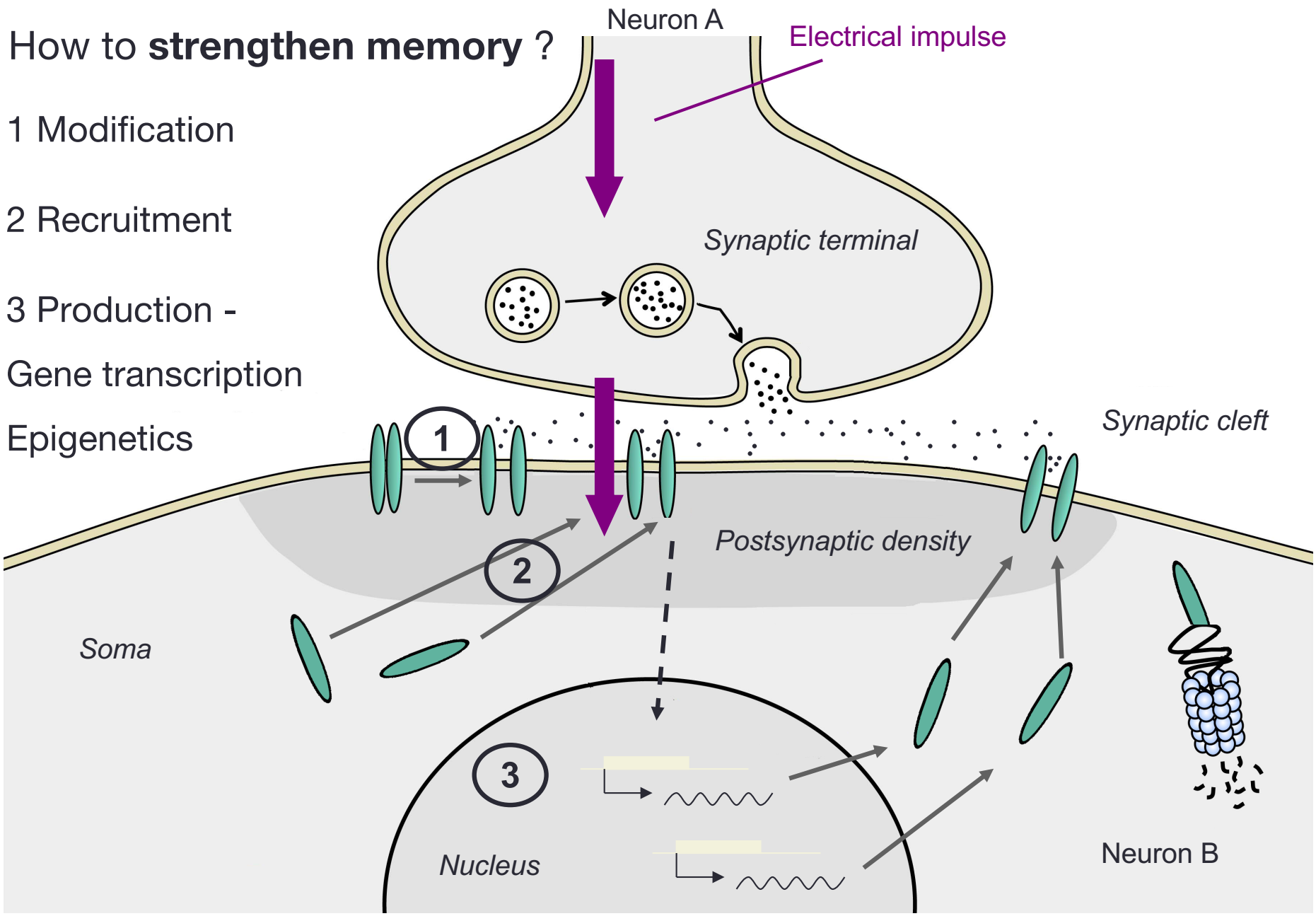
1 Modification

2 Recruitment

3 Production -

Gene transcription

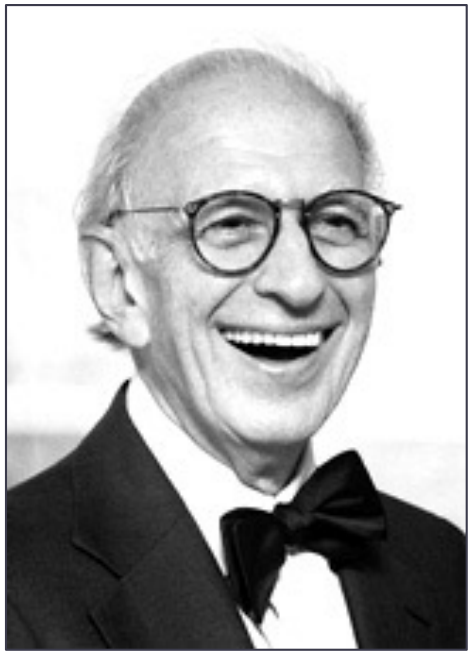
Epigenetics



REVIEW: NEUROSCIENCE

The Molecular Biology of Memory Storage: A Dialogue Between Genes and Synapses

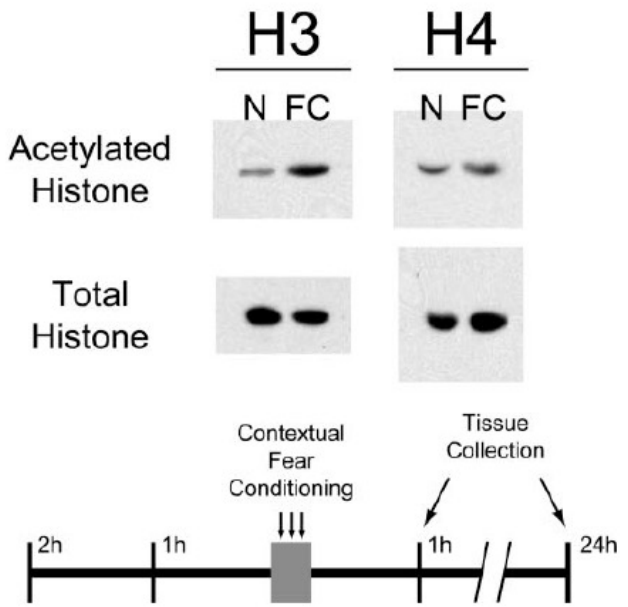
Eric R. Kandel*



Kandel, Science, 2001

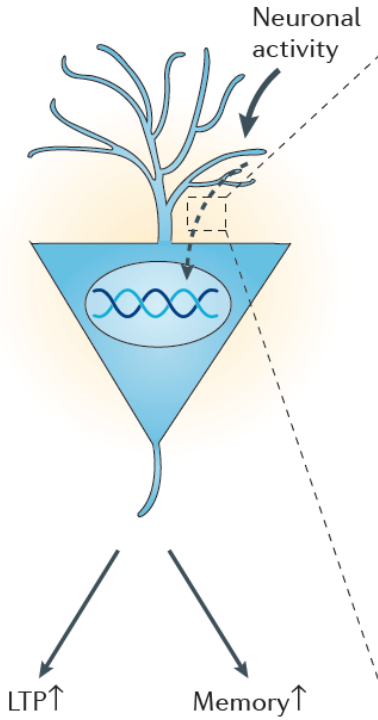
Epigenetic memory?

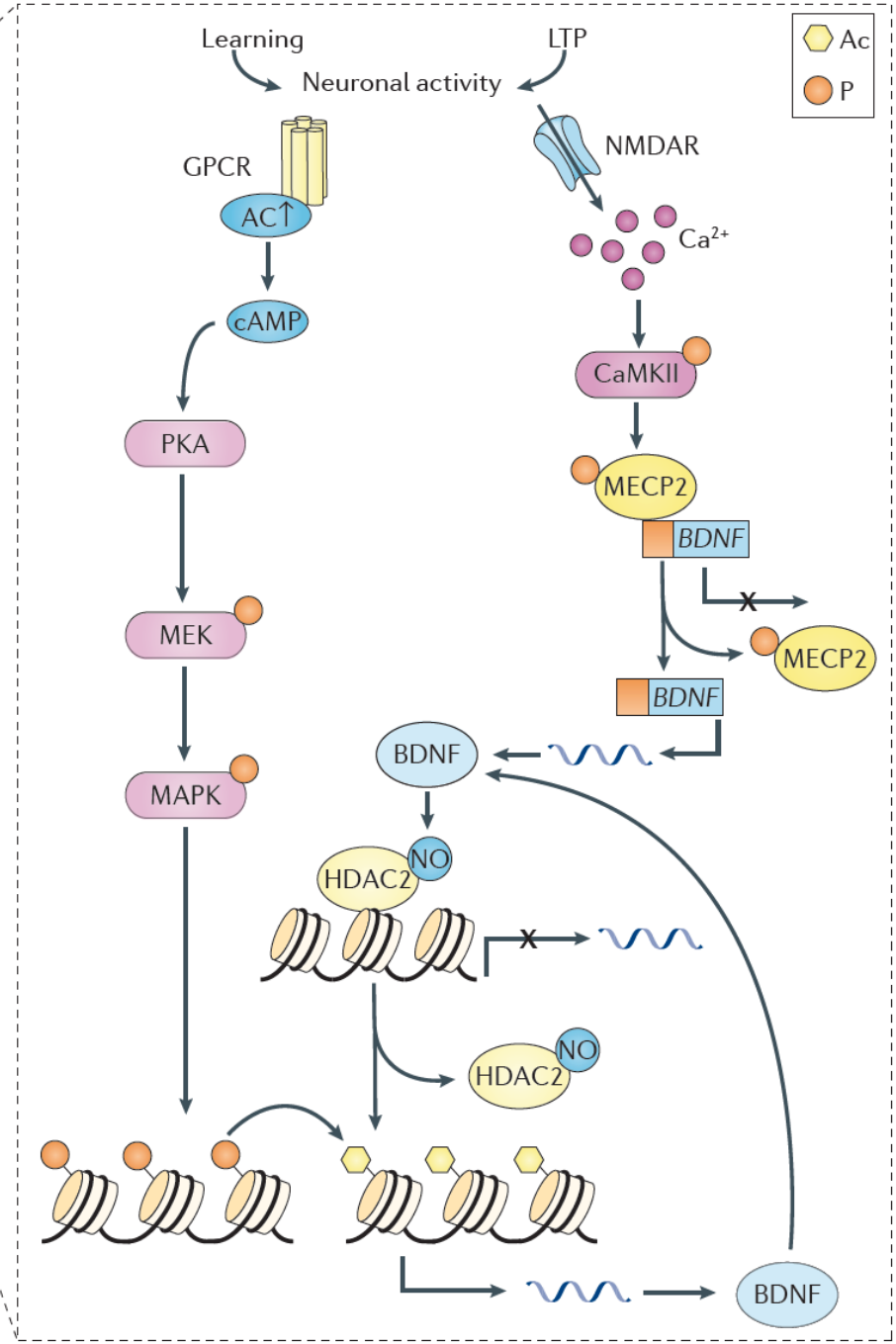
- **Epigenetic mechanisms**
  - = “on” or “above” the genes
  - Mechanisms regulating the compaction of the chromatin
  - Accompany **memory** formation



from Levenson et al. 2004

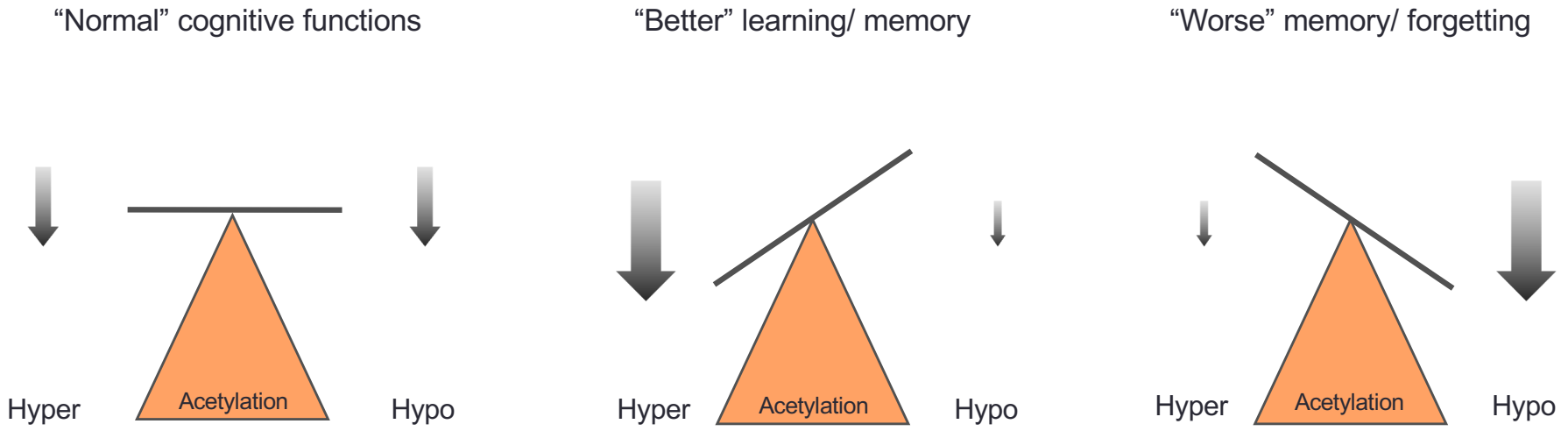
- **Histone acetylation:**





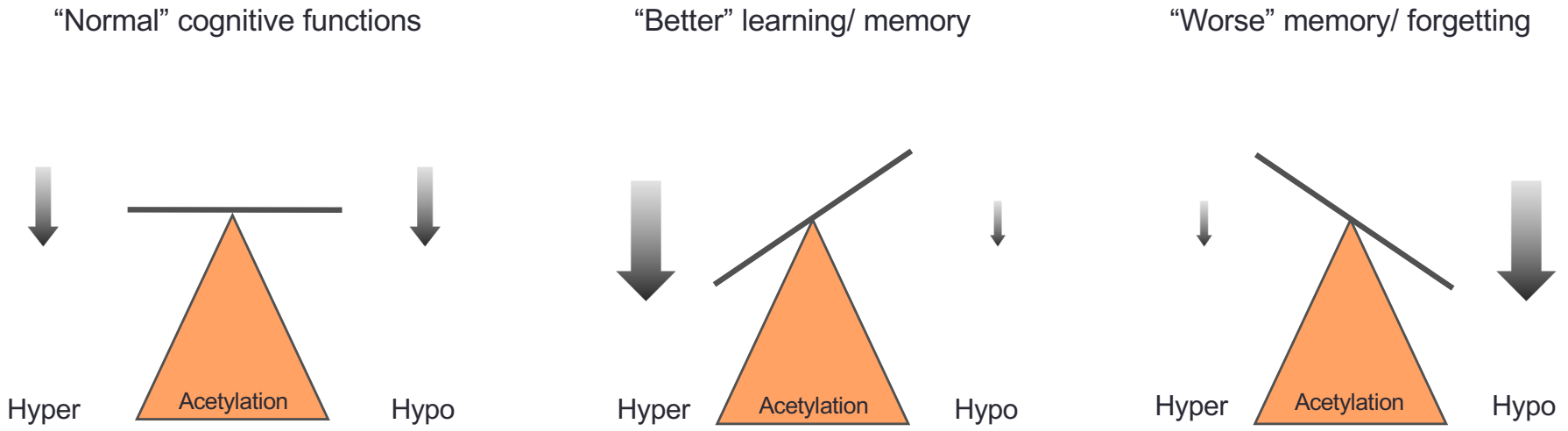
Histone acetylation and memory

- **Histone acetylation and cognitive processes**
  - Increased histone acetylation facilitates synaptic plasticity, learning and memory
  - Decreased histone acetylation constrains synaptic plasticity, learning and memory
    - Reduced attraction between the acetylated (-$COCH_3$) lysine residue on histones (that is positively charged) and the partially negatively charged DNA, thereby facilitating gene transcription

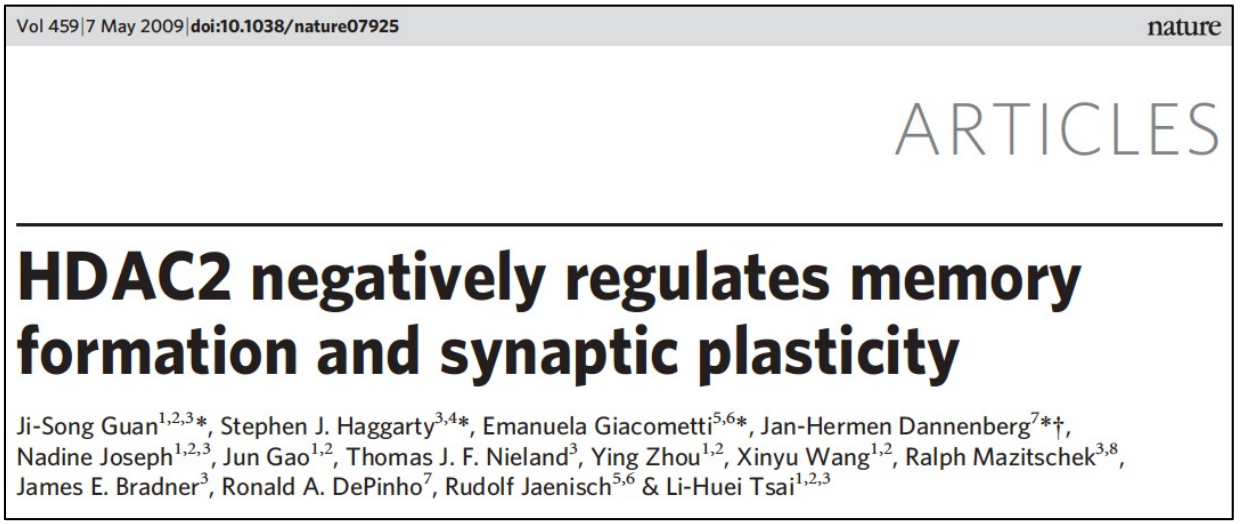


Histone acetylation and memory

- **Histone acetylation and cognitive processes** (Kandel, Sweatt, Abel and others)
  - Catalyzed by **H**istone **A**cetyl **T**ransferases (HATs) and **H**istone **Deac**etylases (HDACs)
    - **HAT**s favor learning and memory Korzus et al., Neuron, 2004; Alarcon et al., Neuron, 2004; Oliveira et al., L&M, 2007
    - **HDAC2** blocks learning and memory Guan et al., Nature, 2009



Epigenetic Mechanisms gone wrong



Vol 459|7 May 2009|doi:10.1038/nature07925 nature

ARTICLES

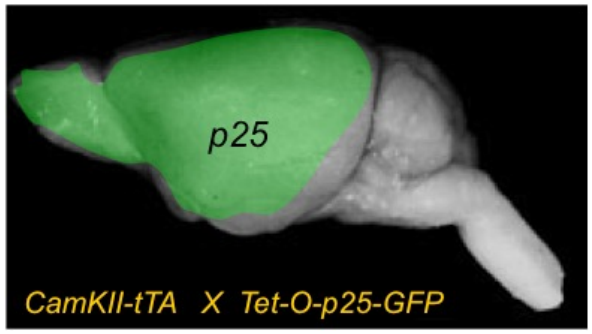
HDAC2 negatively regulates memory formation and synaptic plasticity

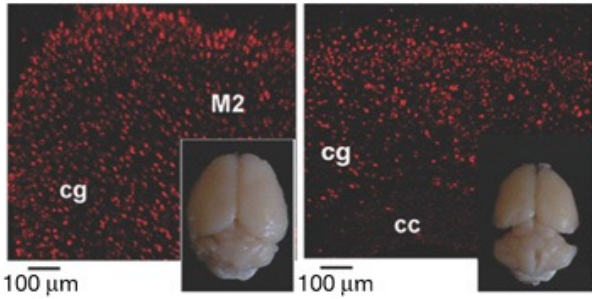
Ji-Song Guan[1,2,3]*, Stephen J. Haggarty[3,4]*, Emanuela Giacometti[5,6]*, Jan-Hermen Dannenberg[7]*†, Nadine Joseph[1,2,3], Jun Gao[1,2], Thomas J. F. Nieland[3], Ying Zhou[1,2], Xinyu Wang[1,2], Ralph Mazitschek[3,8], James E. Bradner[3], Ronald A. DePinho[7], Rudolf Jaenisch[5,6] & Li-Huei Tsai[1,2,3]

- **So, we asked:**
  - **Do epigenetic mechanisms contribute to cognitive decline in AD?**
  - **Does HDAC2 contribute to cognitive decline in AD?**

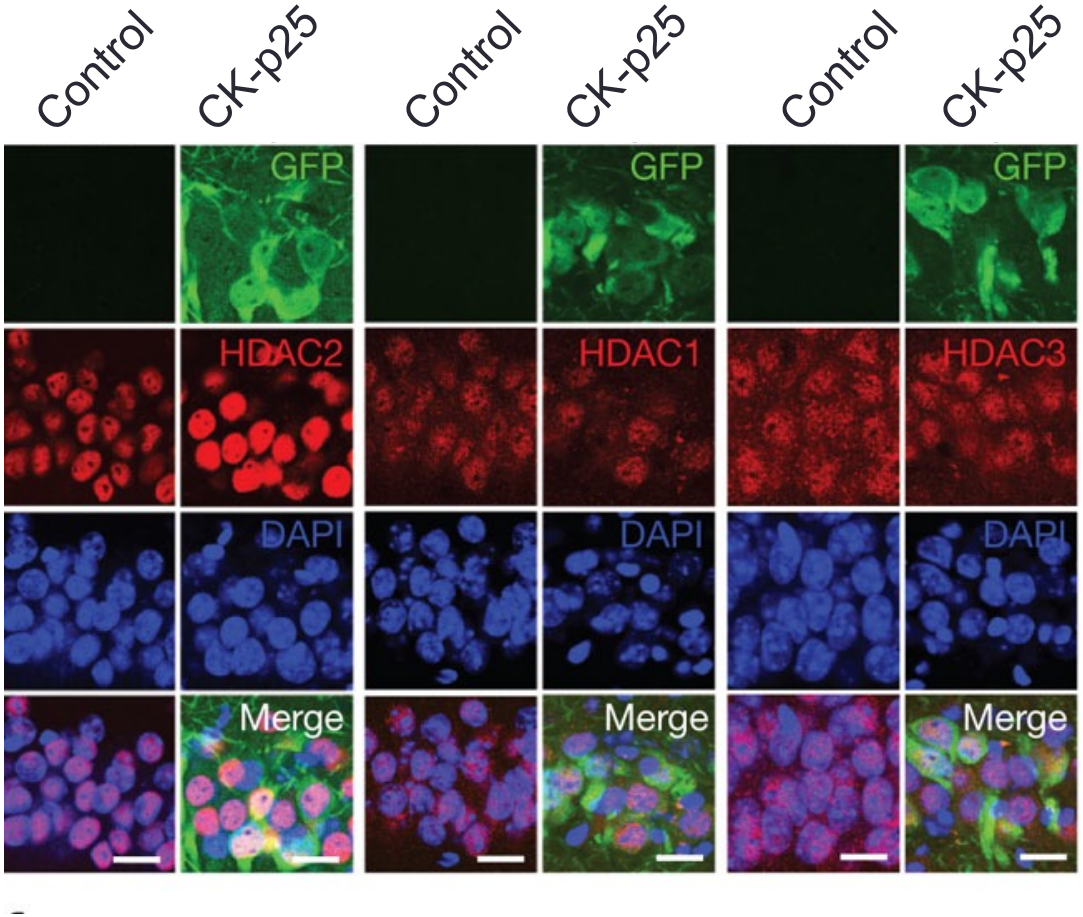
Epigenetic Mechanisms gone wrong

- **Mouse mouse model of AD** Cruz et al., 2003/2006; Fischer et al., 2005
  - Caused by aberrant activity of **C**yclin-dependent **K**inase **5** (CdK5) due to its association with **p25**
    - forebrain-specific expression of p25-GFP
  - Brain mass and neuronal loss
  - Amyloid plaques
  - Learning and memory deficits





- **HDAC2 levels are elevated in the AD mouse brain**



- **Consequences of elevated HDAC2 levels in the AD mouse brain:**

1) **More HDAC2 binding* in the promoter region of genes important for learning and memory**

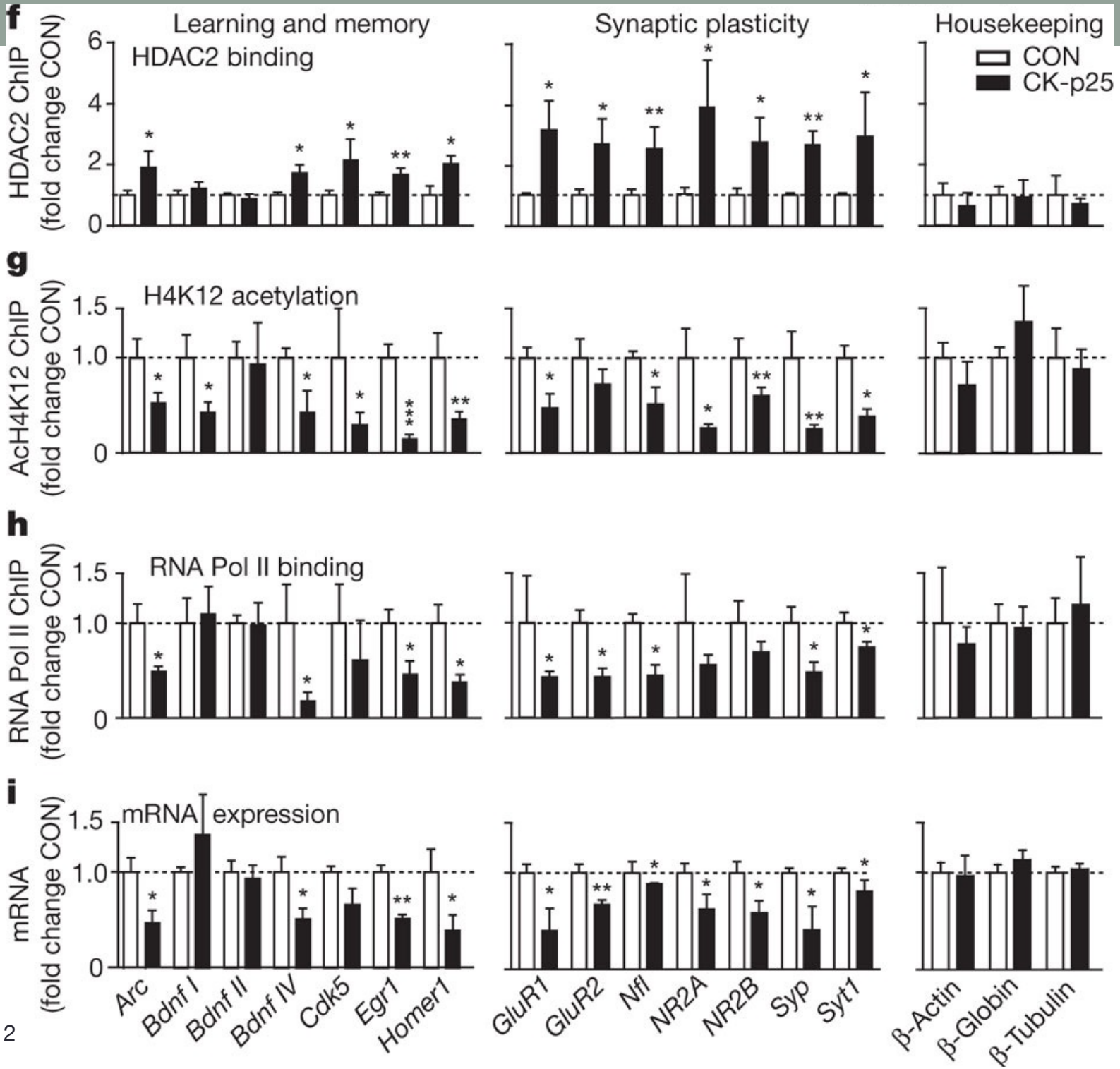
2) **Less histone acetylation* in the same promoter region**

3) **Less binding of the RNA polymerase* responsible for mRNA transcription of these genes**

4) **Less mRNA transcription of these genes**

**measured by chromatin immunoprecipitation (ChIP): Next slide*

An epigenetic blockade of cognitive functions


f
Learning and memory
Synaptic plasticity
Housekeeping
HDAC2 binding
HDAC2 ChIP (fold change CON)
CON
CK-p25
g
H4K12 acetylation
AcH4K12 ChIP (fold change CON)
h
RNA Pol II binding
RNA Pol II ChIP (fold change CON)
i
mRNA expression
mRNA (fold change CON)
Arc
Bdnf I
Bdnf II
Bdnf IV
Cdk5
Egr1
Homer1
GluR1
GluR2
Nfl
NR2A
NR2B
Syp
Syt1
β-Actin
β-Globin
β-Tubulin

Epigenetic Mechanisms gone wrong

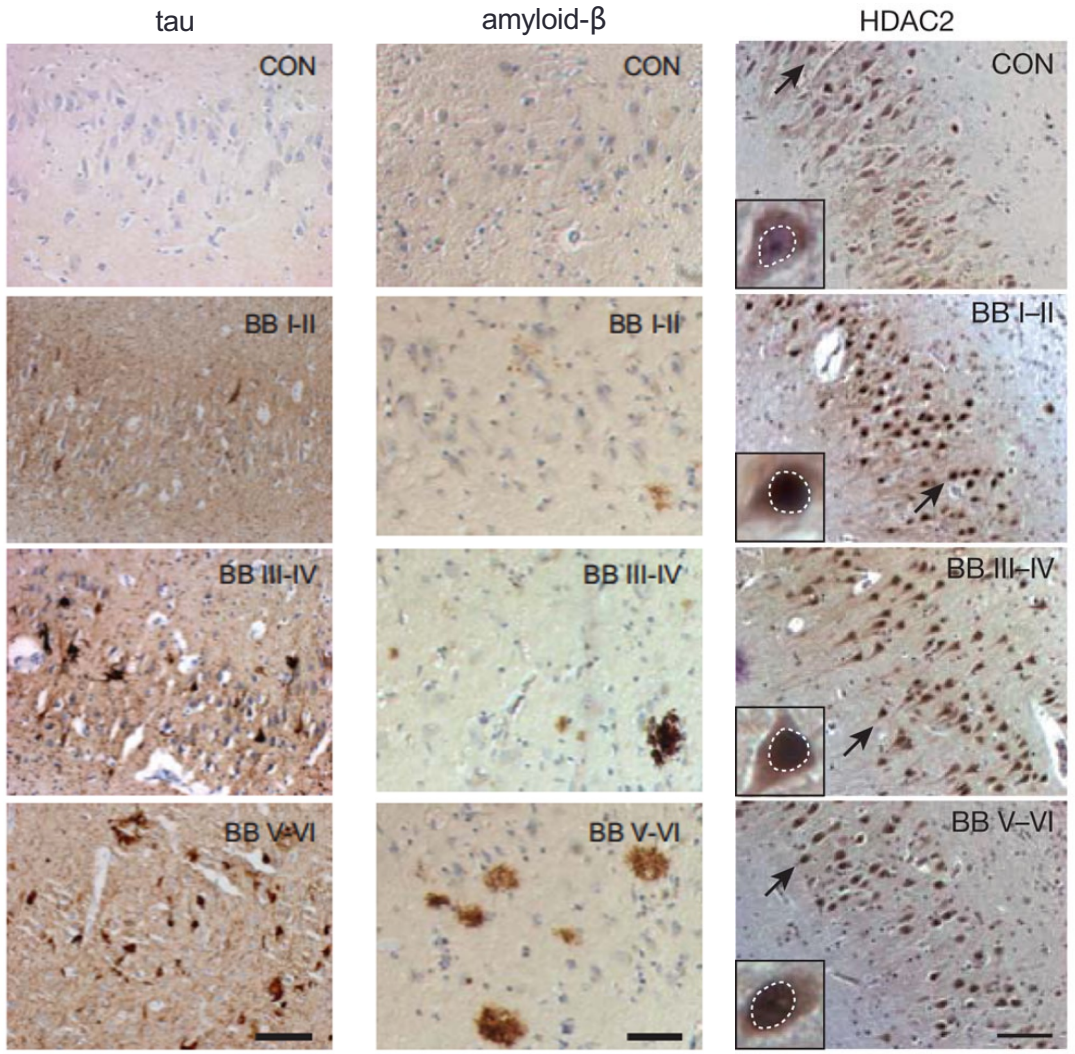
- **HDAC2 in the human AD brain**

CON: No AD pathologies

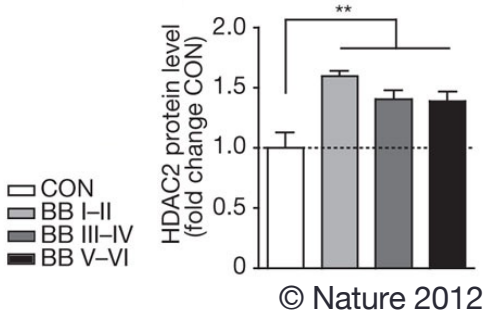
BBI-II: Mild cognitive impairment

BBIII-IV: Moderate AD

BBV-VI: Severe AD

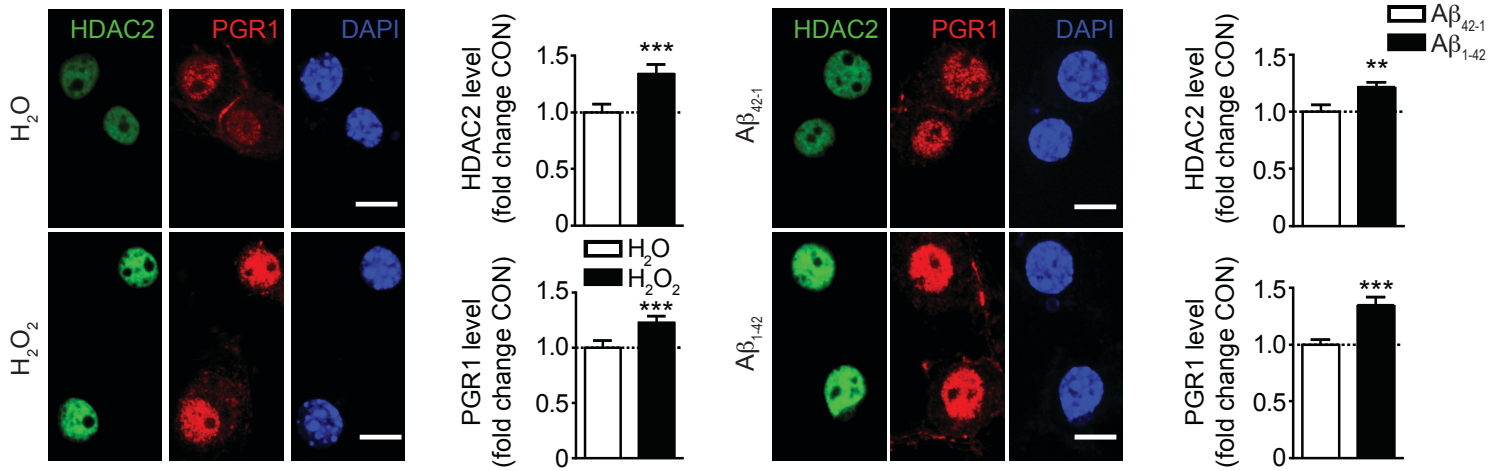


A similar epigenetic blockade in the human AD brain?



Epigenetic Mechanisms gone wrong

- **What are the mechanisms behind the upregulation of HDAC2?**
  - Responsive to oxidative stress (H_2O_2) and neurotoxic insults (amyloid-β)
  - transcriptionally regulated via glucocorticoid receptor element (GRE)?



Transcription factor binding sites in HDAC2 promoter?

GRE consensus sequence

GRE sequence in HDAC2 promoter

CAAGAAGAAAGTGGCTAC

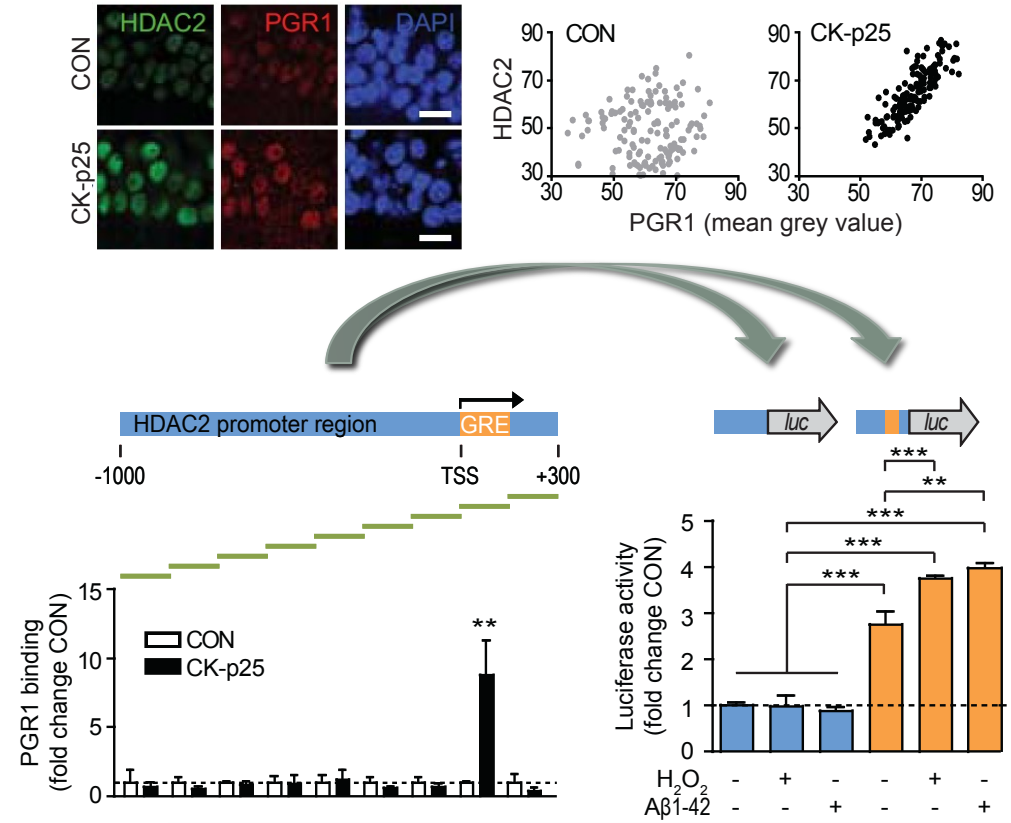
+25 +43

Glucocorticoid receptor (GR1)

- stress hormone receptor
- transcription factor
- activated by phosphorylation

Epigenetic Mechanisms gone wrong

- **What are the mechanisms behind the upregulation of HDAC2?**
  - Correlation between phosphorylated, i.e. activated GR and HDAC2 also *in vivo*
  - PGR binds to the *HDAC2* promoter region

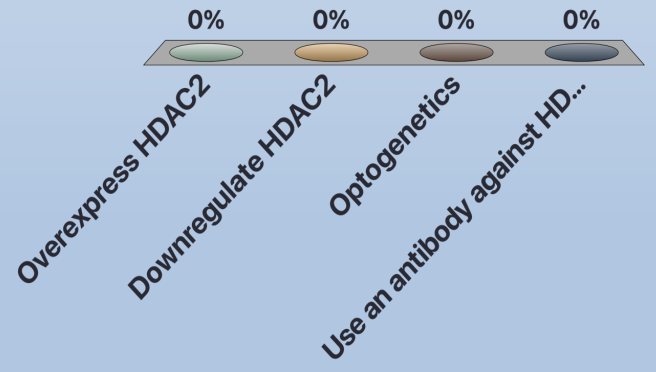


Neurotoxic insults drive the upregulation of HDAC2 via stress hormone receptors.

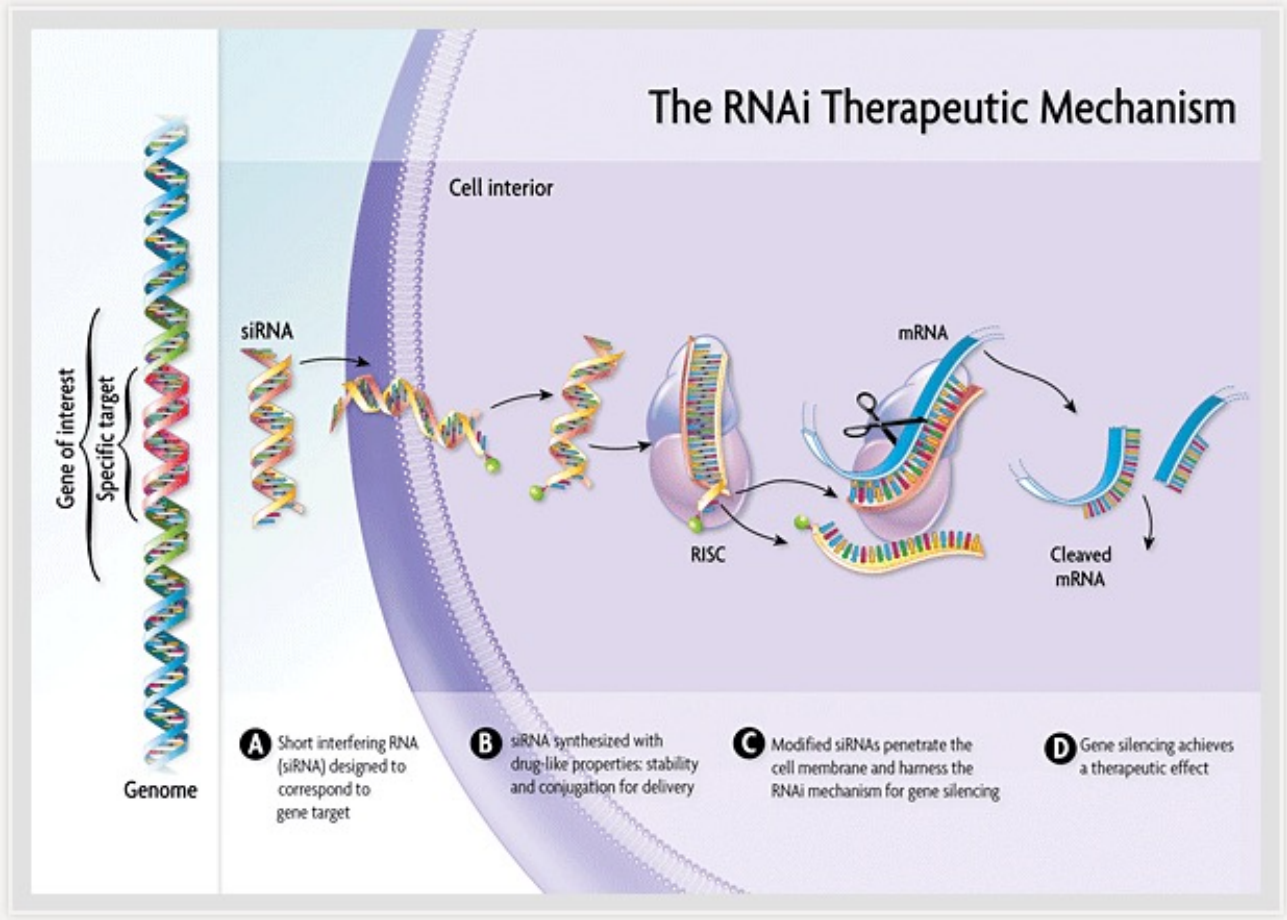
ttpoll.eu ->bio480jg

How can you prove that HDAC2 is causally responsible for all these changes?

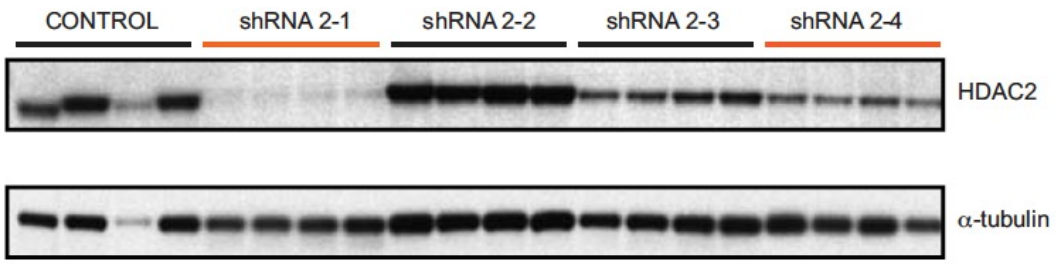
A. Overexpress HDAC2
B. Downregulate HDAC2
C. Optogenetics
D. Use an antibody against HDAC2



- **Functional importance for learning and memory?**
  - **RNAi expression to reduce elevated HDAC2 levels**

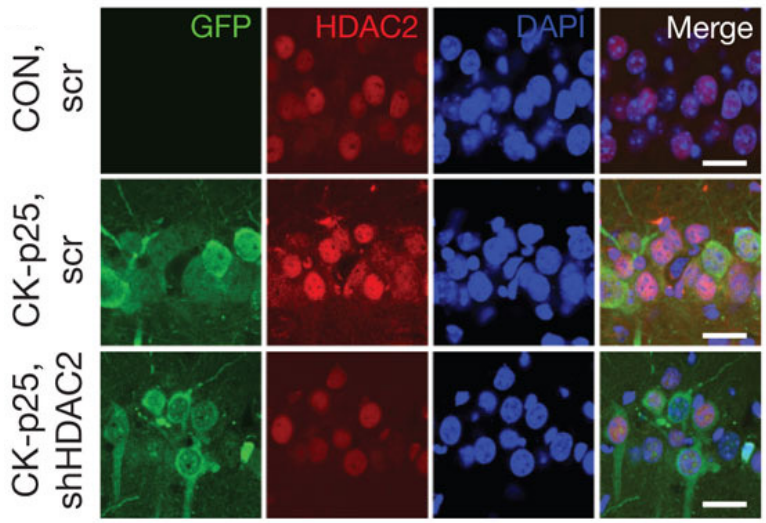


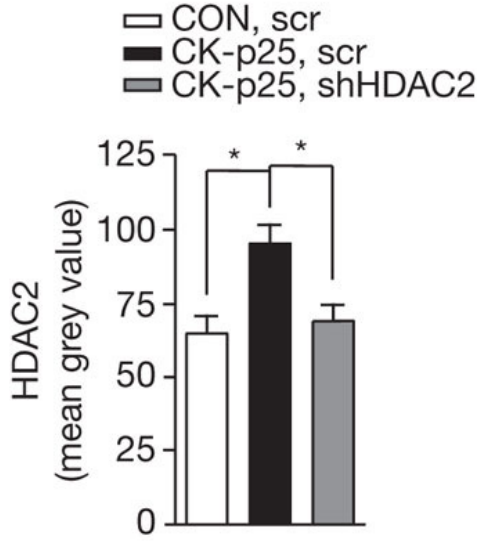
- **Functional importance for learning and memory?**
  - **RNAi expression to reduce elevated HDAC2 levels**
    - **Testing different shRNA constructs (different sequences)**



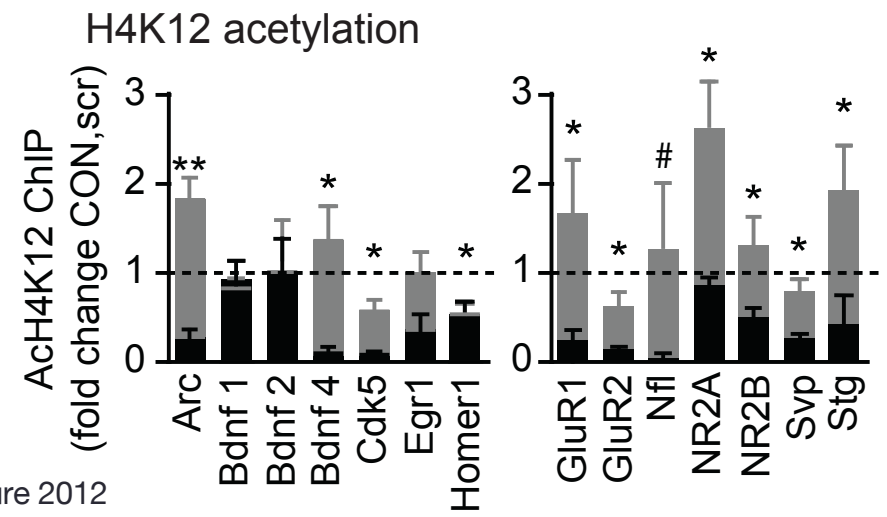
Epigenetic Mechanisms gone wrong

- **RNAi-mediated reversal of HDAC2 levels?**

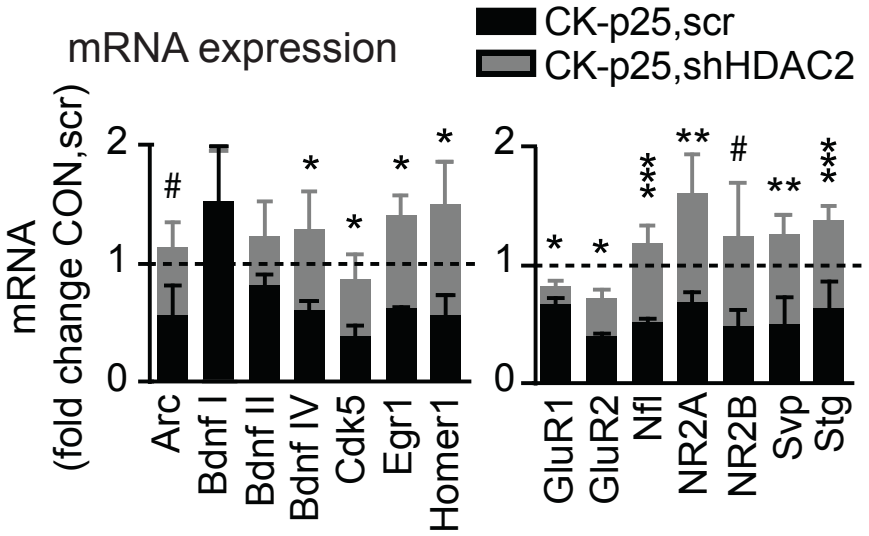




Restored histone acetylation

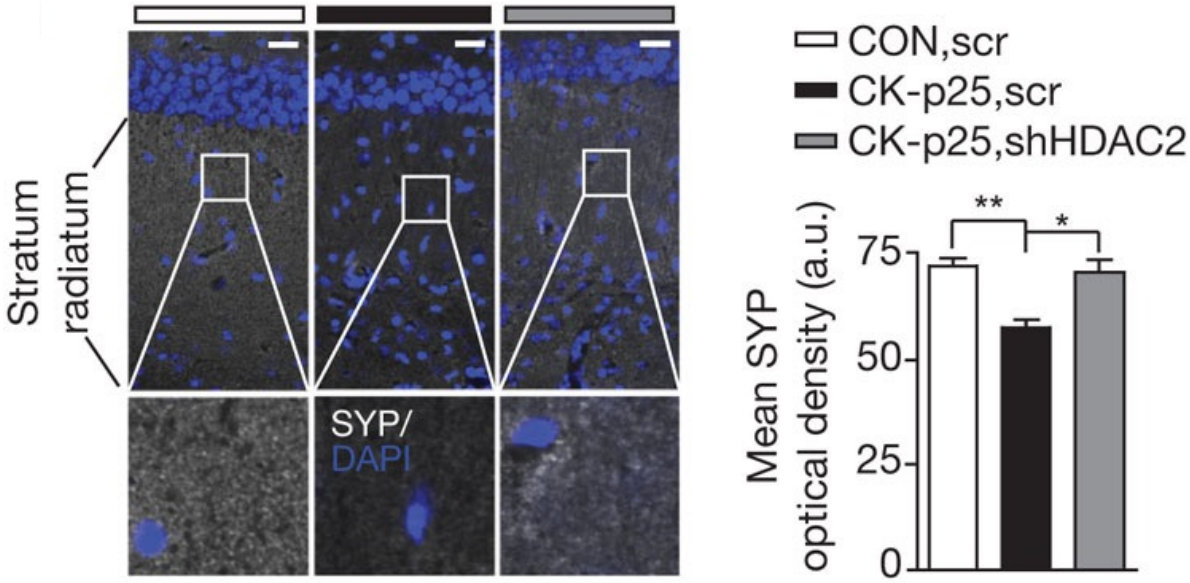


Restored plasticity-related gene expression



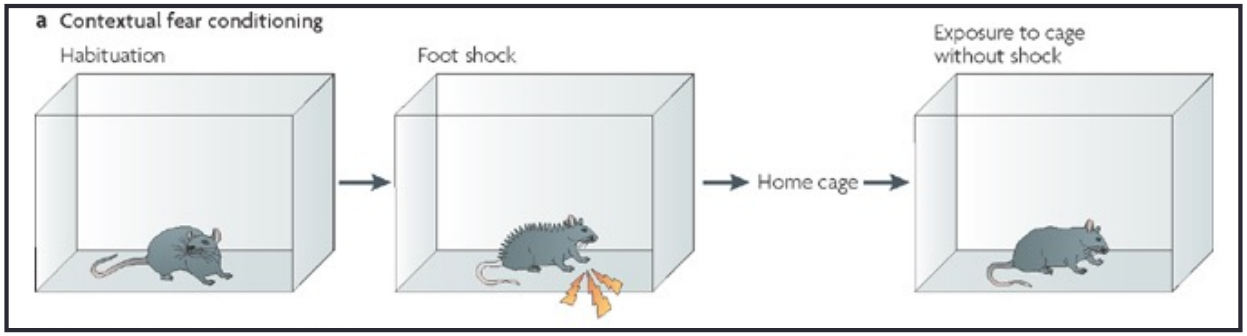
Epigenetic Mechanisms gone wrong

- **Restored structural plasticity**
  - as assessed by synaptophysin (SYP) IHC, a marker of synaptic density

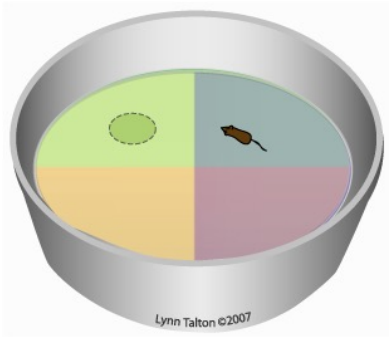


Epigenetic Mechanisms gone wrong

- **Restored cognitive capacities**
  - Associative memory: Pavlovian Fear Conditioning

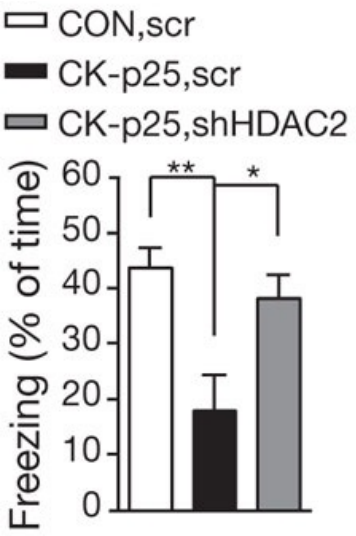


  - Spatial memory: Water Maze



Epigenetic Mechanisms gone wrong

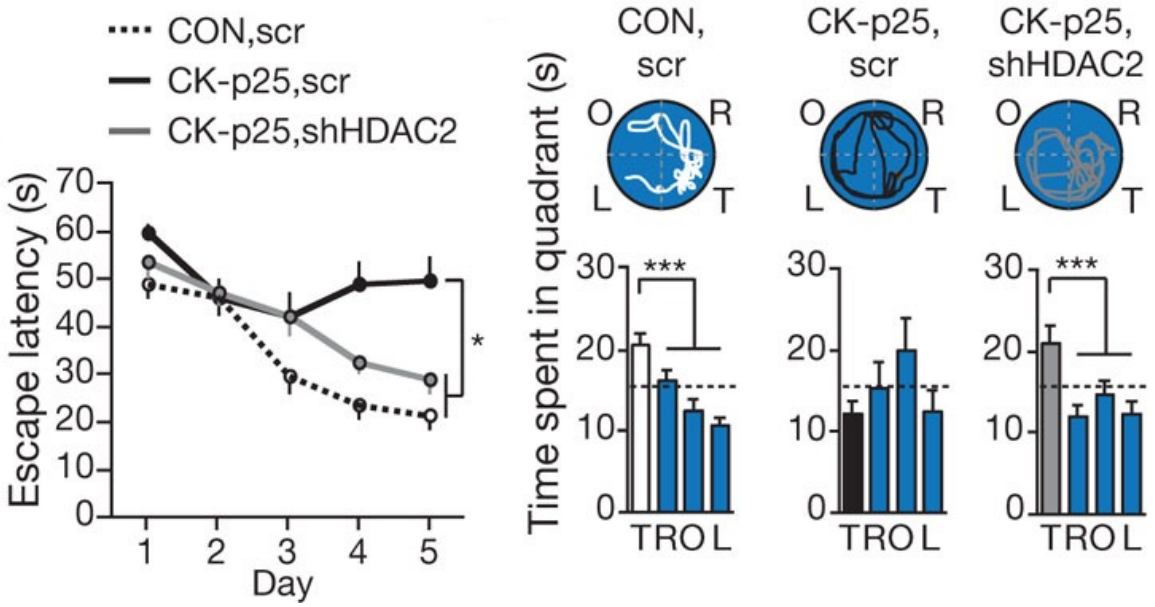
- **Restored cognitive capacities**
  - Associative memory: Fear Conditioning



Epigenetic Mechanisms gone wrong

- **Restored cognitive capacities**
  - Spatial Memory: Water Maze

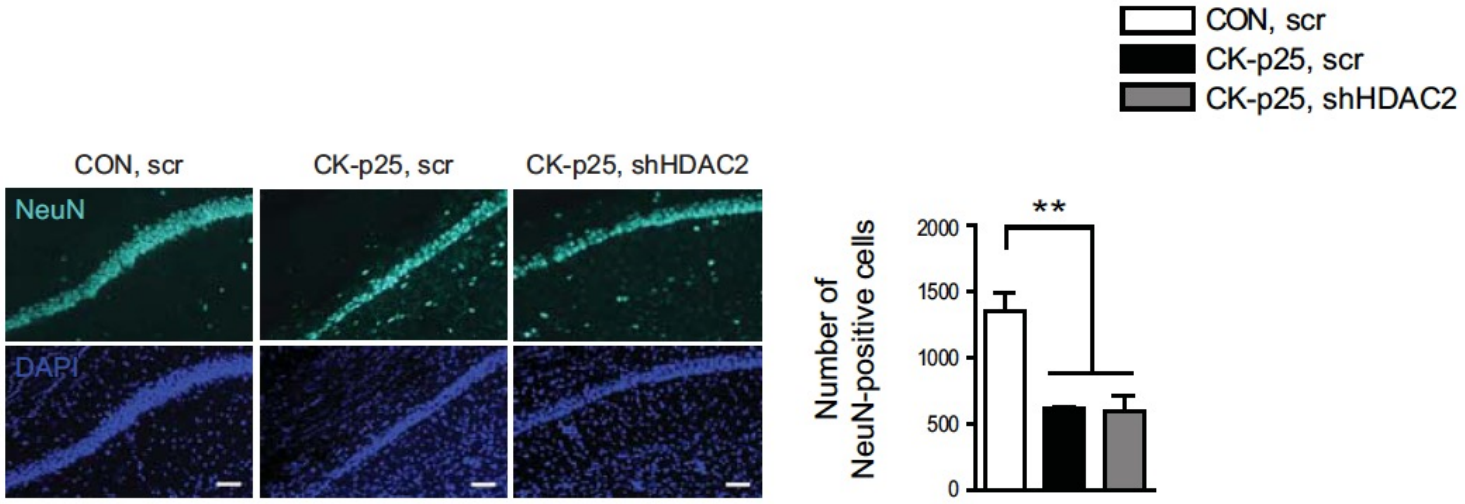
Training/Acquisition Testing/24h memory



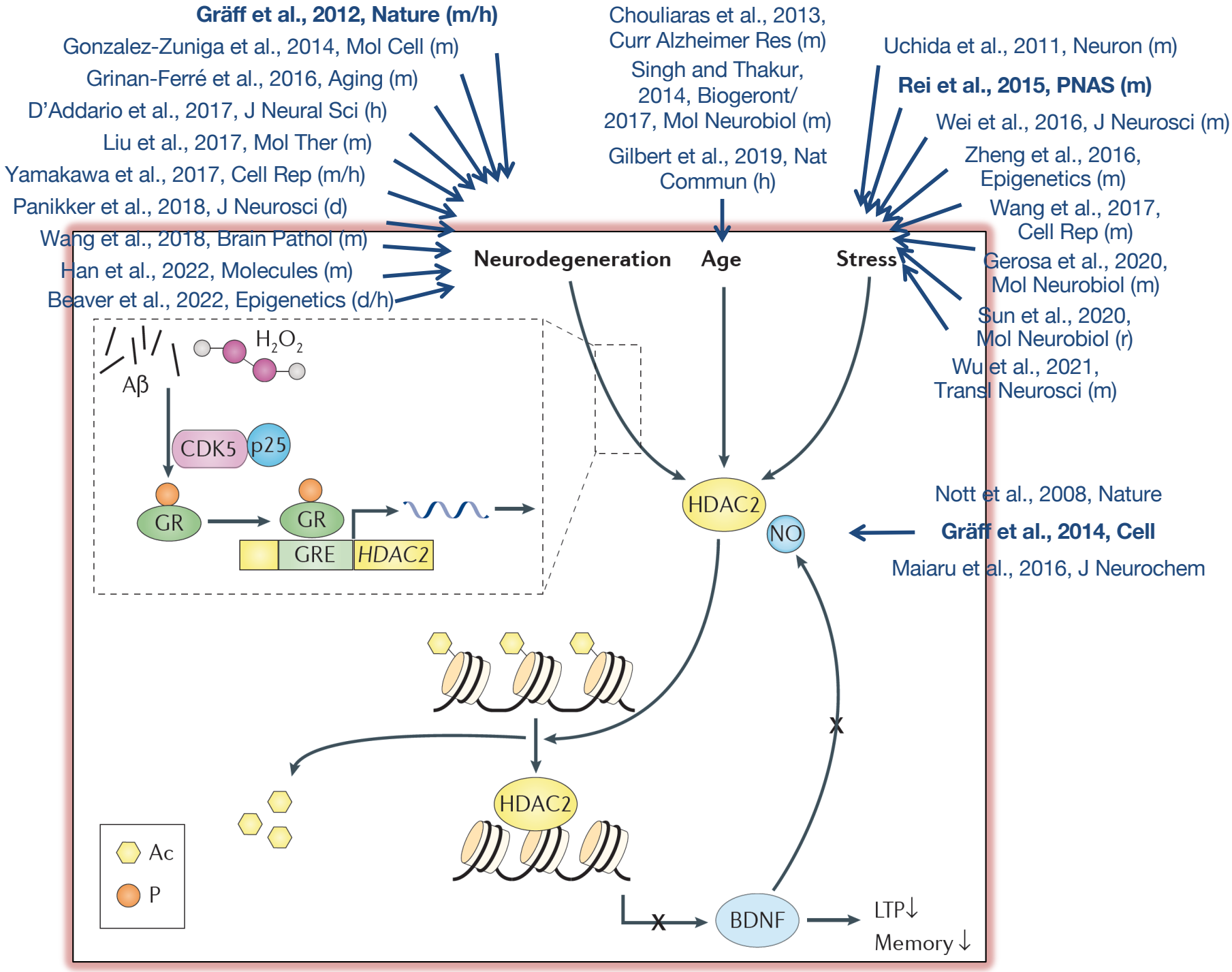
The epigenetic blockade on cognitive functions is potentially reversible.

Epigenetic Mechanisms gone wrong

- **Despite persistent neuronal loss.**
  - Number of neurons (NeuN staining)

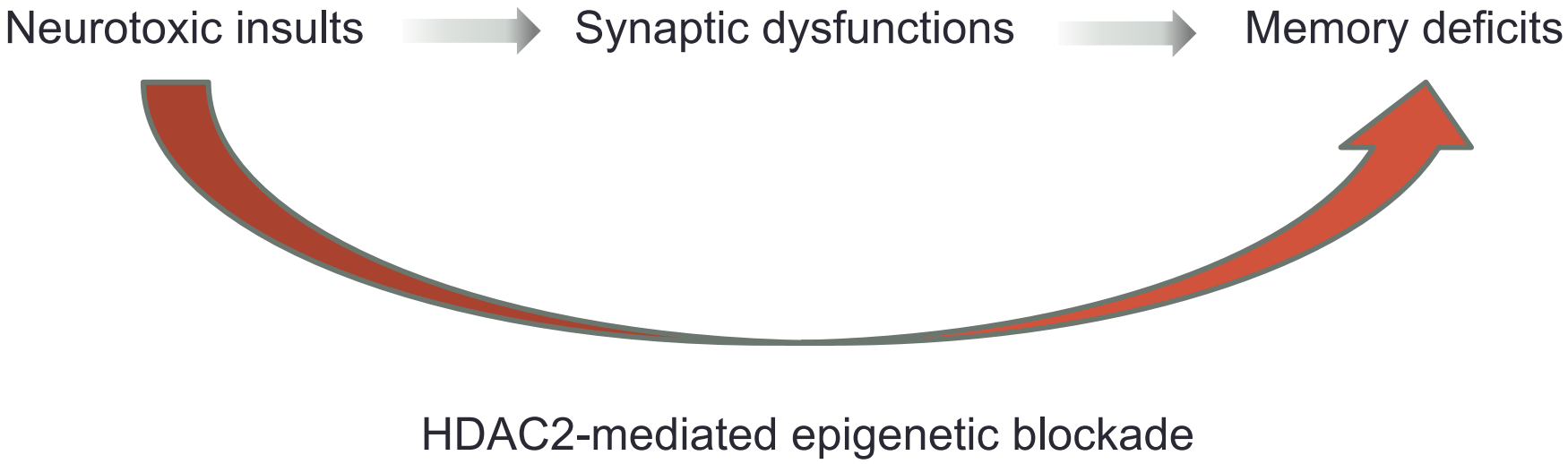


Even in a severely degenerated brain,
neuronal plasticity is not entirely lost, but merely constrained.

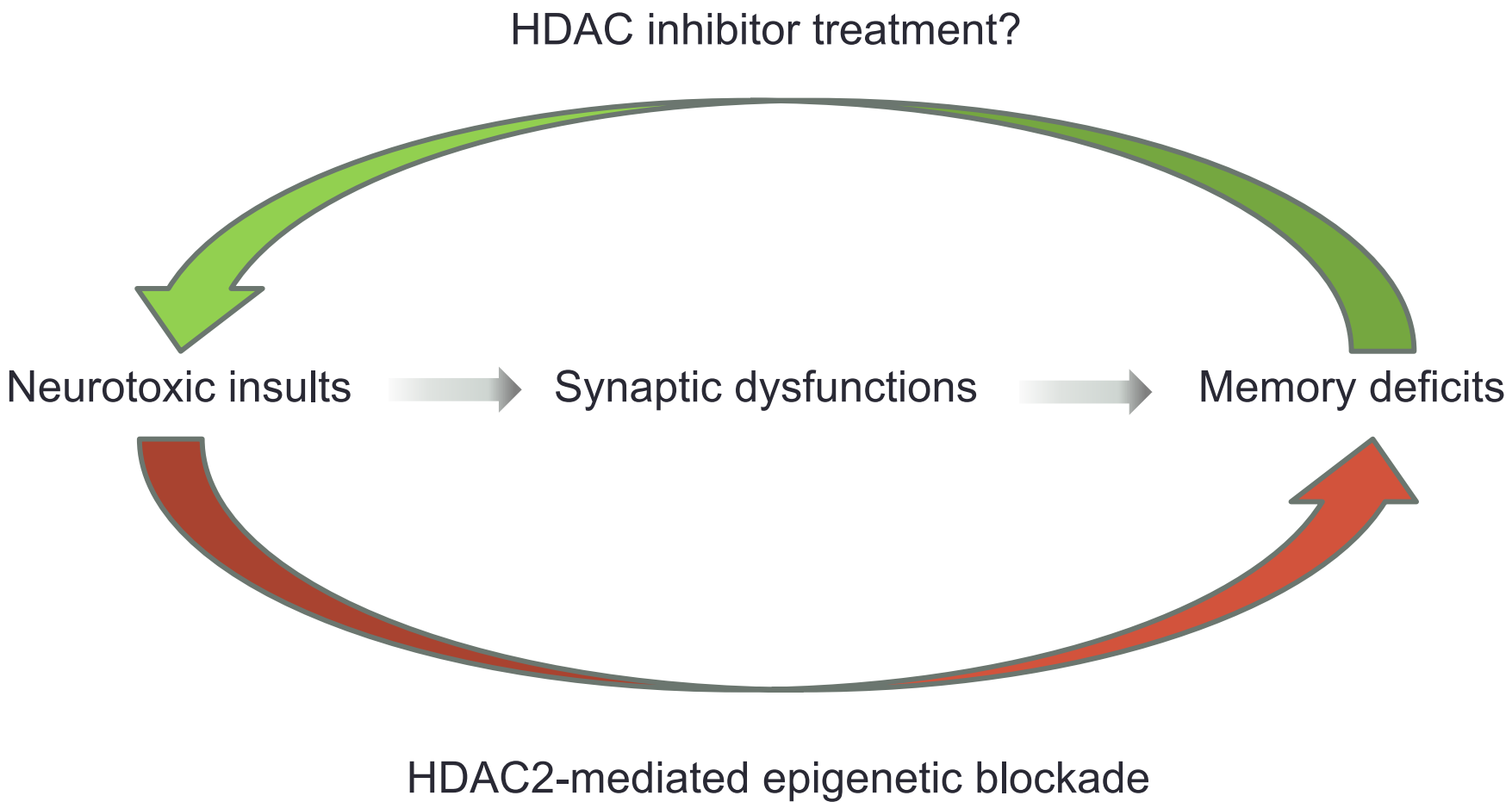


updated from Gräff and Tsai, 2013, Nat Rev Neurosci

Epigenetic Mechanisms gone wrong

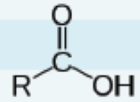
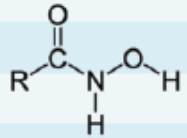
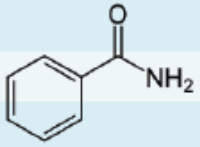


- **Can this be overcome? The case of HDAC inhibitors**

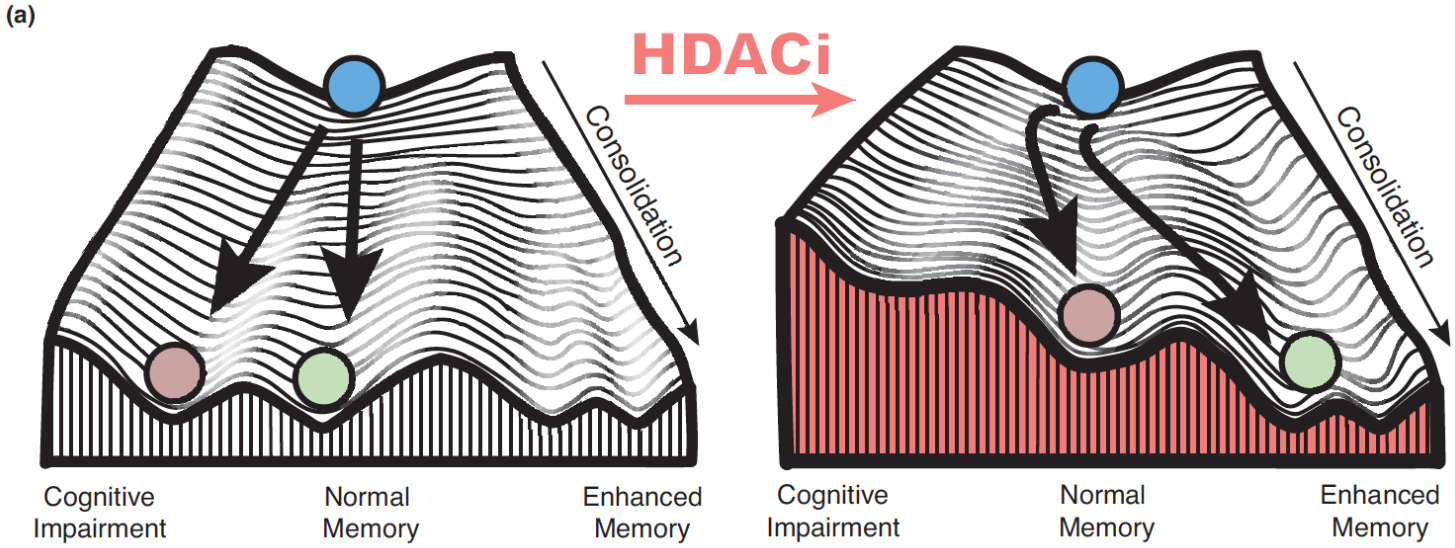


- **Can this be overcome? The case of HDAC inhibitors**

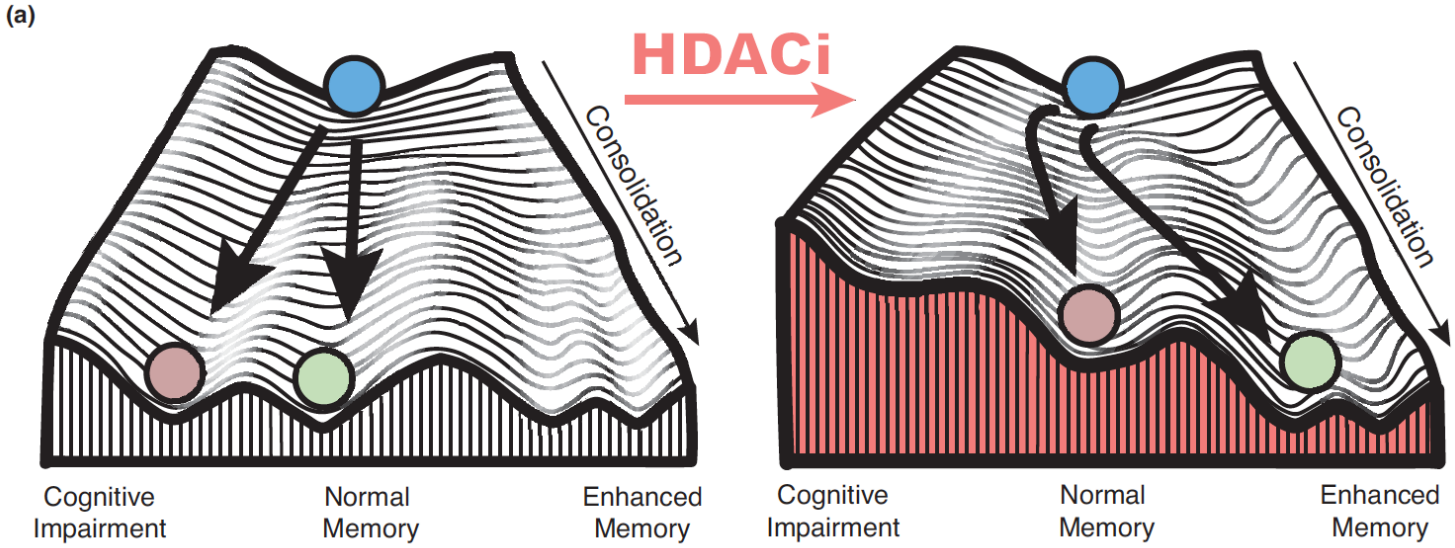
Table 2 HDAC inhibitors used as treatments against cognitive decline or as pure cognitive enhancers

Structural Class	Selectivity	HDACi	Cognitive Process: Treatment of decline	Cognitive Process: Enhancement	Refs
Carboxylic acids 	Class I	NaB	Rescue of contextual fear and spatial memories in CK-p25 mice		(73)
			Rescue of fear memory in APP/PS1 mouse models		(51; 74)
			Rescue of object memory in $CBP^{KIX/KIX}$-mice		(72)
				Enhancement of contextual memory in mice, rats, and crabs	(6; 29; 62; 73)
				Enhancement of spatial learning	(73)
				Enhancement of object recognition and location memory in mice and rats	(72; 81; 82)
		PB	Rescue of contextual fear memory in APP/PS1 mice		(74)
			Rescue of associative memories in Tg2576 mice		(75)
		Valproic Acid	Rescue of contextual fear memory in APP/PS1 mice		(74)
				Enhancement of spatial memory in rats	(79; 80)
Hydroxamic acid 	Class I and II	TSA	Rescue of object memory deficits in CBP <HAT>-mice		(40)
			Rescue of contextual fear memory in APP/PS1 mice		(50)
				Enhancement of fear potentiated startle in rats	(76)
				Enhancement of contextual memory in mice and crabs	(25; 29; 77)
				Enhancement of cued fear memory reconsolidation	(24)
				Enhancement of object memory	(83)
		SAHA	Rescue of contextual fear memory in $CBP^{+/-}$ mice		(39)
Benzamide group 	Class I (mostly HDAC3)	MS-275		Enhancement of contextual fear memory	(62)
				Enhancement of object memory	(83)
		RGFP 136		Enhancement of object location memory	(63)

Understanding the mode of action of HDAC inhibitors



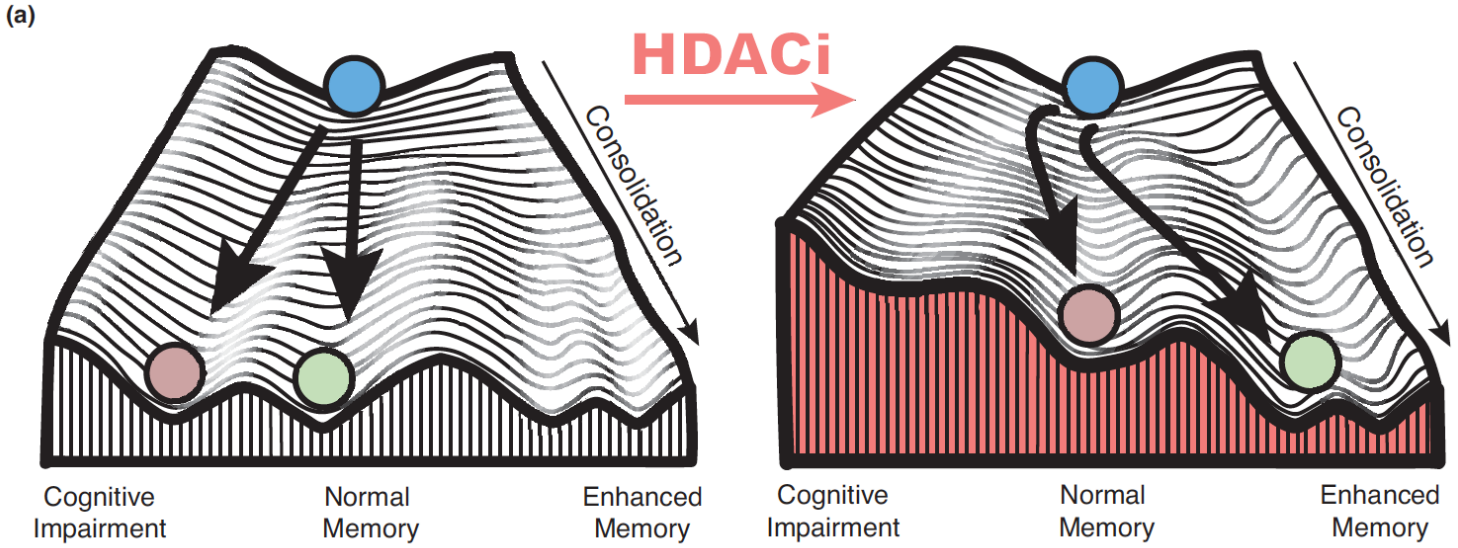
Understanding the mode of action of HDAC inhibitors



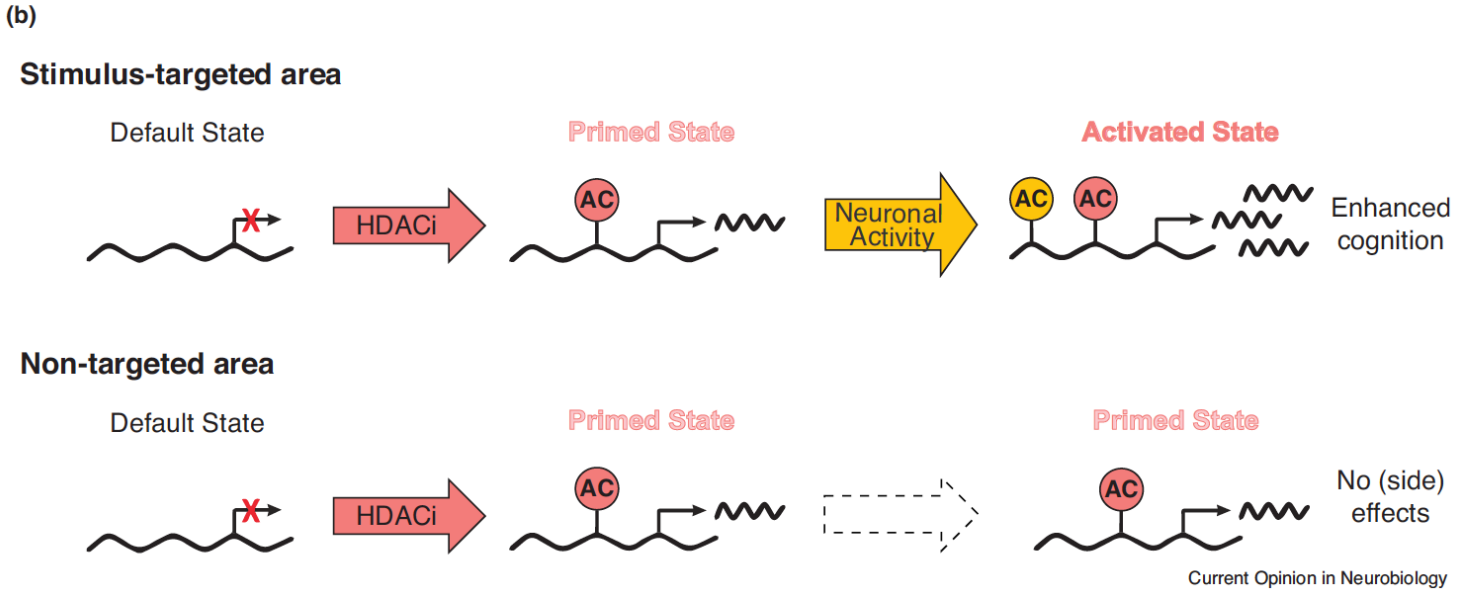
How would that be possible?

- HDACis are given systemically (i.p.)
  - They lack target specificity...
    - Can we still target a brain area implicated in cognitive decline?

Understanding the mode of action of HDAC inhibitors

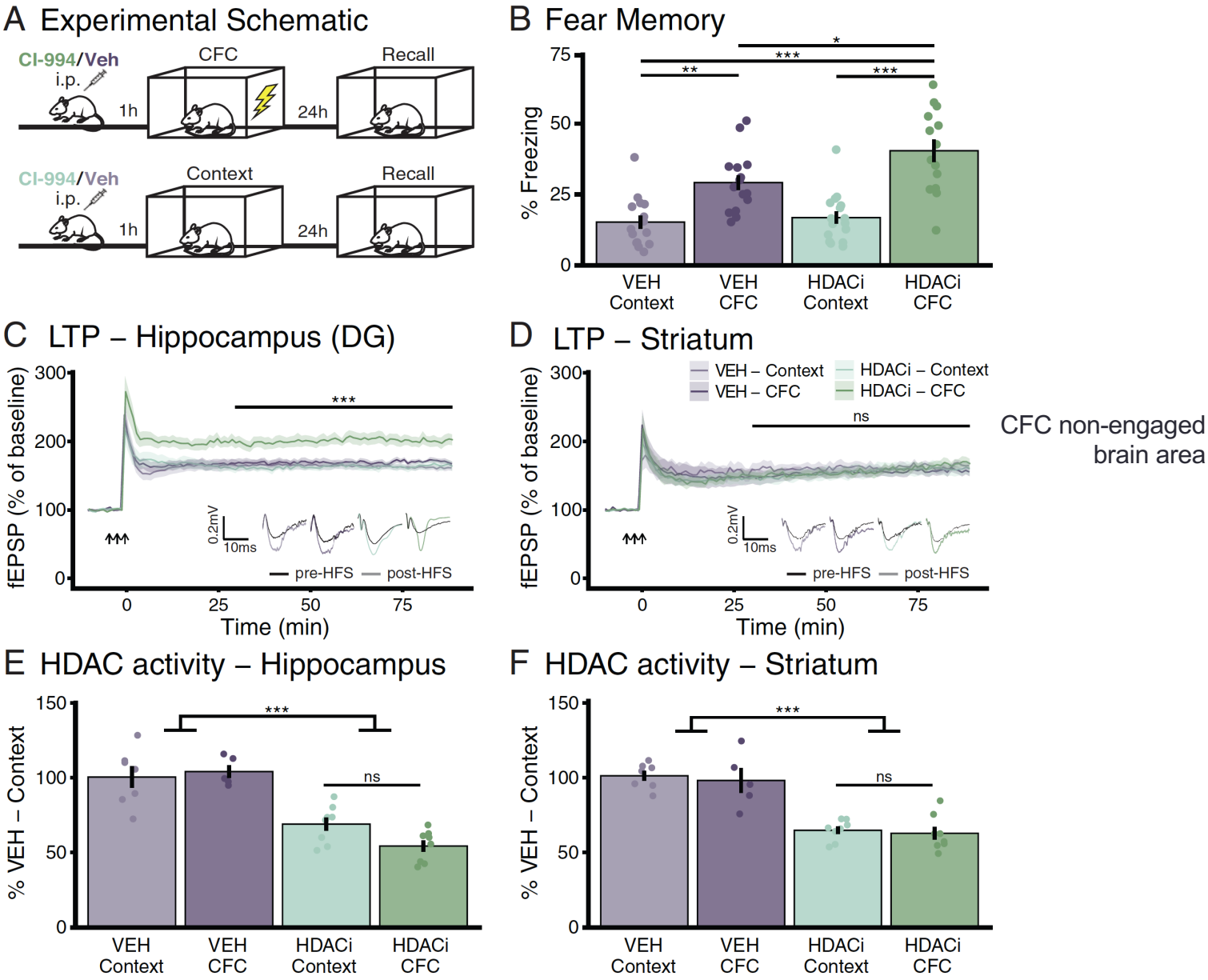


Hypothetical mode of action:



Cognitive epigenetic priming

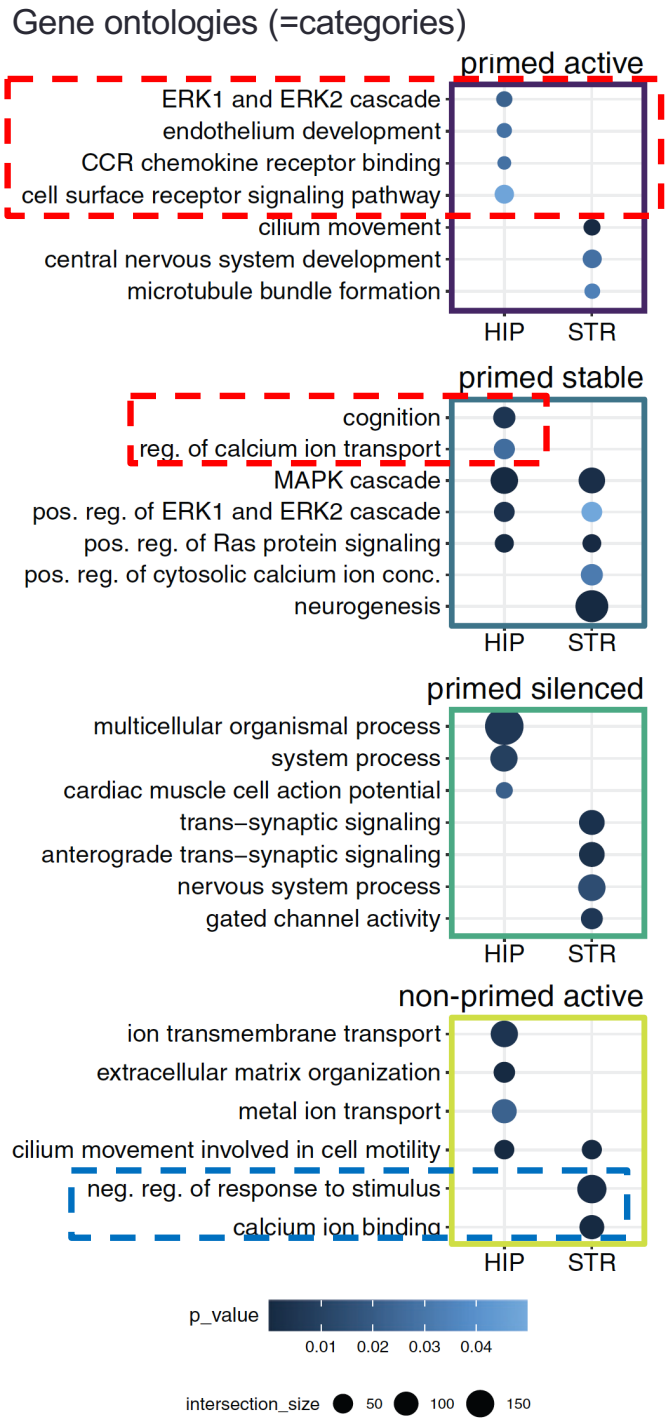
CFC-engaged brain area



CFC non-engaged brain area

Cognitive epigenetic priming

Differential gene expression (whole brain area)



The Potential of HDAC Inhibitors as Cognitive Enhancers

ClinicalTrials.gov
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- **”VALPRO” (NCT0278913):**
  - HDACi valproic acid to support exposure therapy for arachnophobia
- **“VostatAD01” (NCT03056495):**
  - Determine tolerability of HDACi SAHA in patients with mild AD

Cognitive epigenetic priming

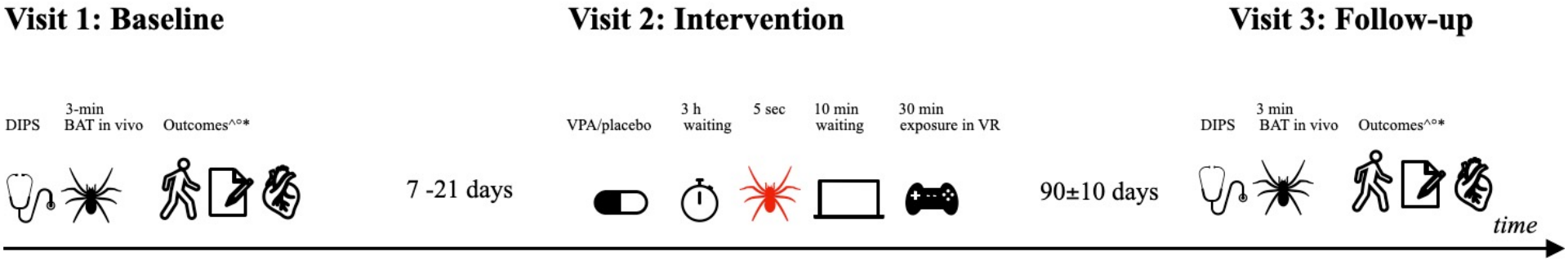
- **Can we test this in humans?**
  - Use of valproic acid (VPA) instead of CI-994
    - pan-HDAC inhibitor
    - FDA approved against bipolar disorder and epilepsy
  - Arachnophobia
  - Virtual reality setting

Dorothée Benz

Dominique de Quervain

Cognitive epigenetic priming

- **Experimental setting:**



DIPS=structured clinical interview (DSM-IV)

BAT=behavioral approach test

Outcomes included:

Objective measurements: SCL, skin conductance levels; startle reaction; heart rate

Subjective measurements: FSQ, fear of spiders questionnaire, SBQ, spider's belief questionnaire

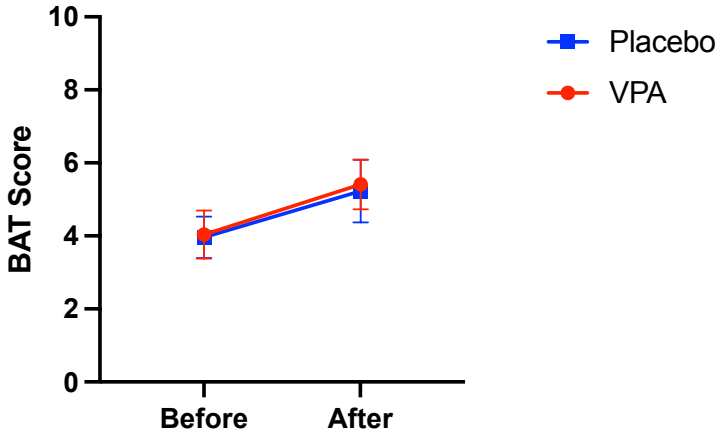
Schicktanz et al., Psych Med, 2025

Cognitive epigenetic priming

- **Results:**

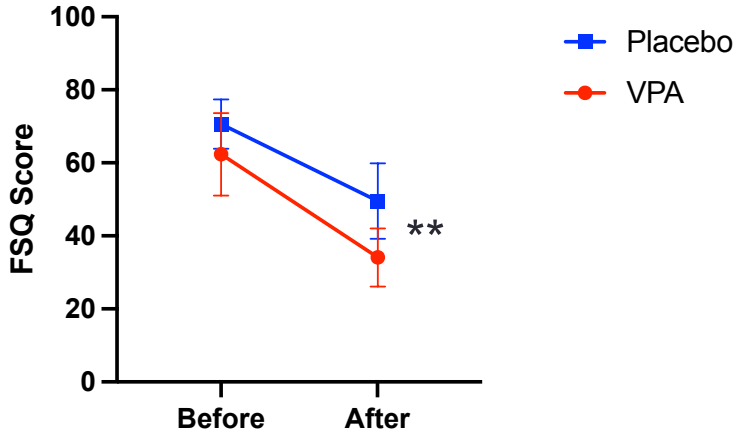
Promising results to reduce subjective fear

Objective measurements – Approach behavior



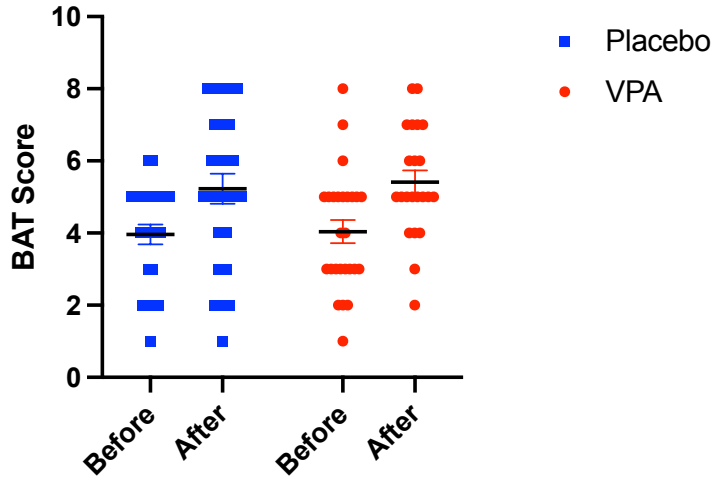
Cohen's d=0.23
p=0.46

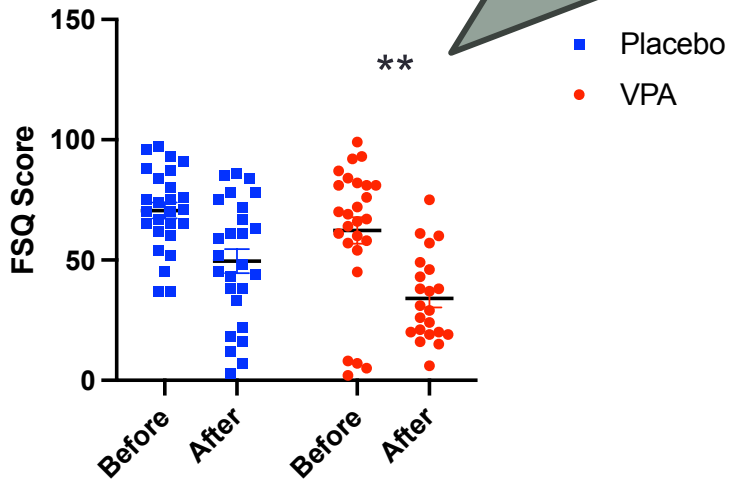
Subjective measurements – Fear of spiders



Cohen's d=0.95
p=0.003

similar results for SBQ





Schicktanz et al., Psych Med, 2025

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Kamilla
Woznika Miskowiak

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- **New grant to test HDACi SAHA in patients with major depressive disorder**


Damage
ChIP
Water-Maze
Neurotoxic
Braak
H202
Priming
Single-cell
shRNA
HDACi
GR
HDAC2
Luciferase