



Icahn School
of Medicine at
**Mount
Sinai**

*The Ronald M. Loeb
Center for Alzheimer's
Disease*



*Neuropathology
Brain Bank
at Mount Sinai*

Traumatic Brain Injury

John F. Crary, MD-PhD

john.crary@mountsinai.org; www.crarylab.org

Professor, Department of Pathology, Nash Family Department of Neuroscience
Director, Neuropathology Brain Bank & Research Core
Mount Sinai, New York, NY

Disclosures

I have no relevant financial relationships to disclose

Overview

- Acute TBI
- Chronic TBI

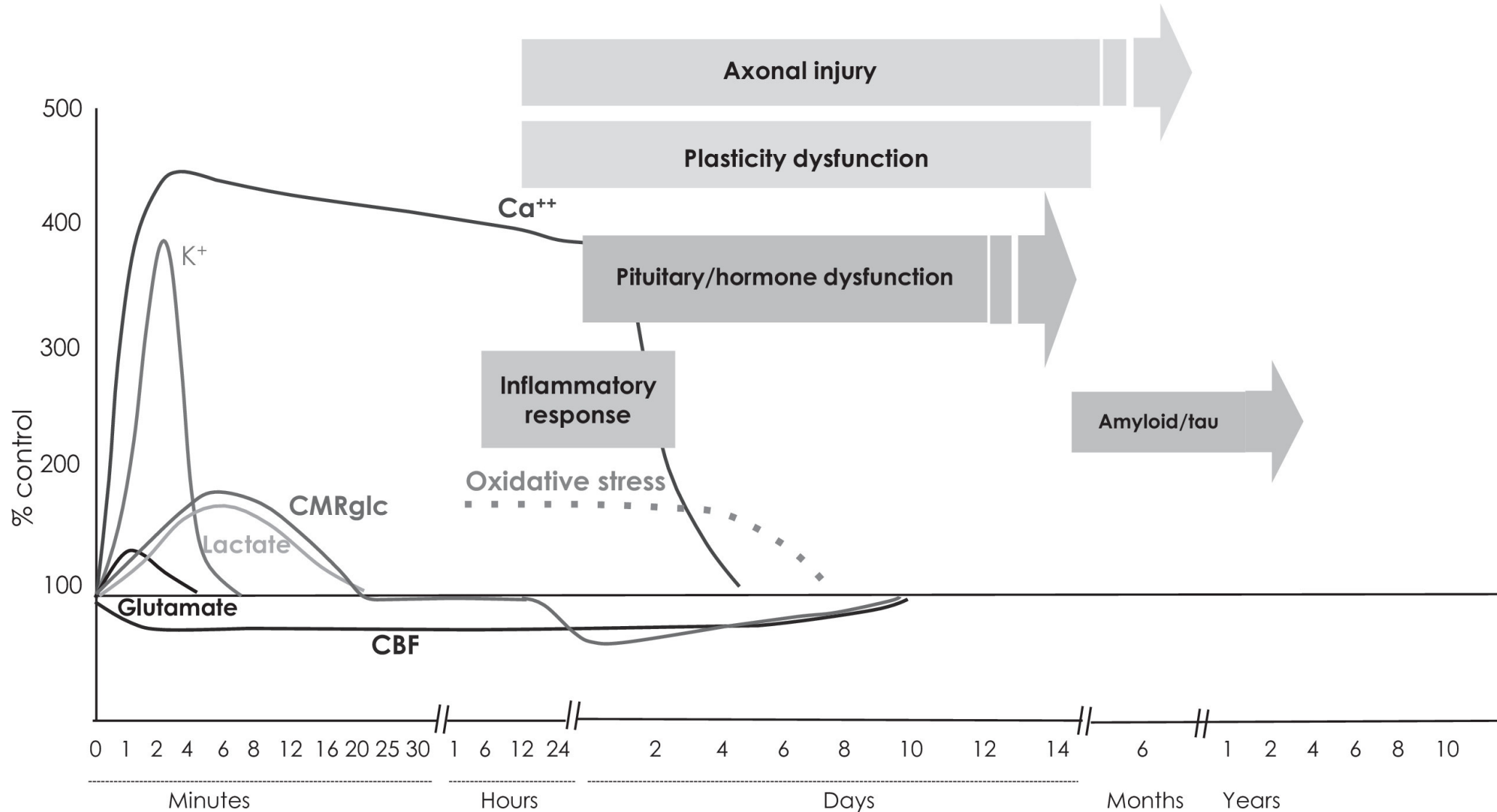
Introduction: overview of TBI

- Definition: “an alteration in brain function, or other evidence of brain pathology, caused by an external force”*
- The causes are numerous and include penetrating and non-penetrating injuries
- Begins with mechanical deformation of the brain parenchyma
- Triggers pathophysiological responses that are among the most complex phenomenon of all organs, with a myriad of dynamic structural/cellular, metabolic, molecular processes that vary with time and severity

Introduction: overview of TBI

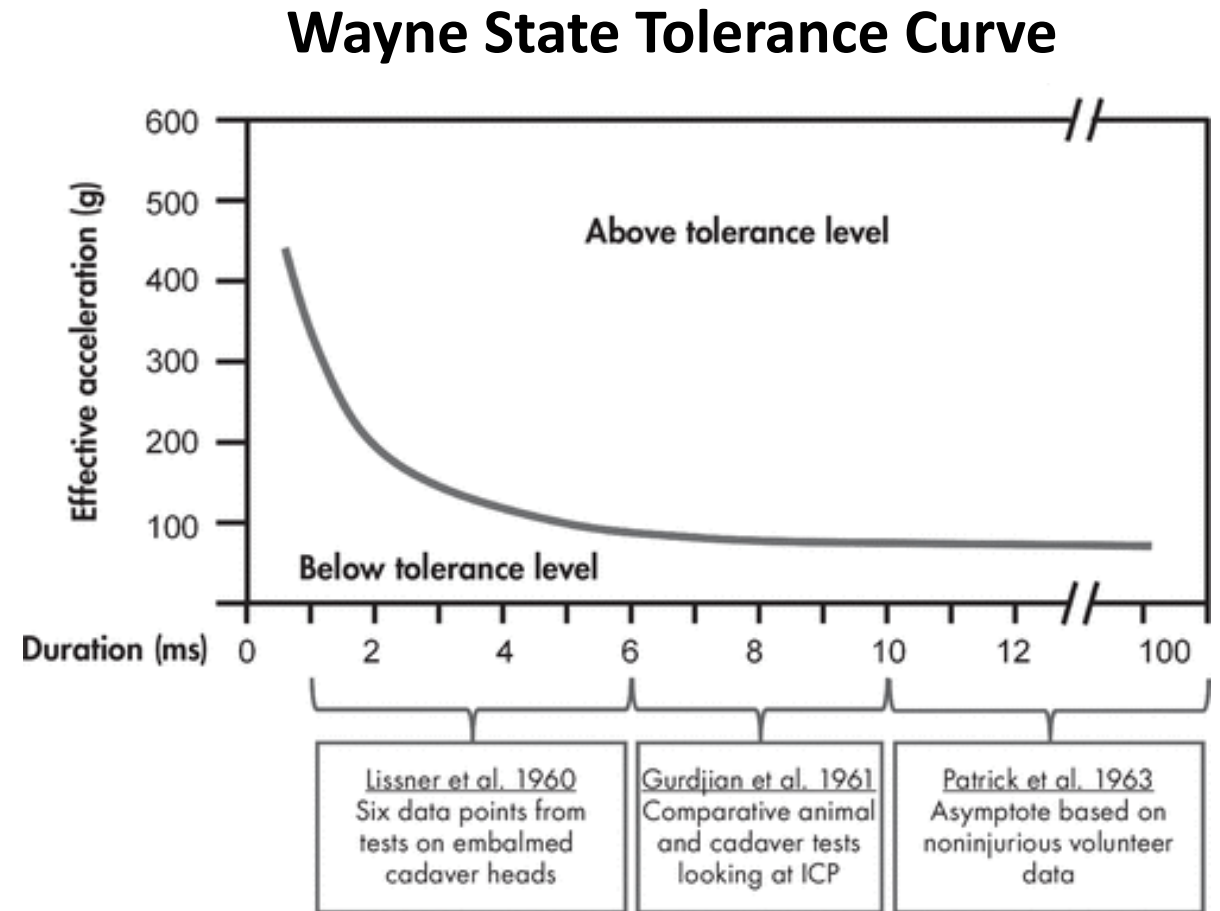
- Understanding TBI requires a holistic approach:
 - Macroscopic (structural/gross neuroanatomy)
 - Microscopic (cellular/physiological)
 - Molecular
- In considering the pathobiology, it is common to discuss in the context of:
 - Mild through severe
 - Focal and diffuse
 - Acute and chronic

The “metabolic cascade”



Biomechanics of TBI: general concepts

- Human data is critical for developing protective equipment and safety standards
- Human data is difficult to obtain because functional outcomes are hard to obtain in laboratory settings (e.g., cadaveric research)



Glasgow Coma Scale (GCS) predicts outcomes

- Different degrees of morbidity and mortality
- Assumes that different forms of TBI are comparable
 - But injuries are often mixed, recent studies focus on pathoanatomical characteristics

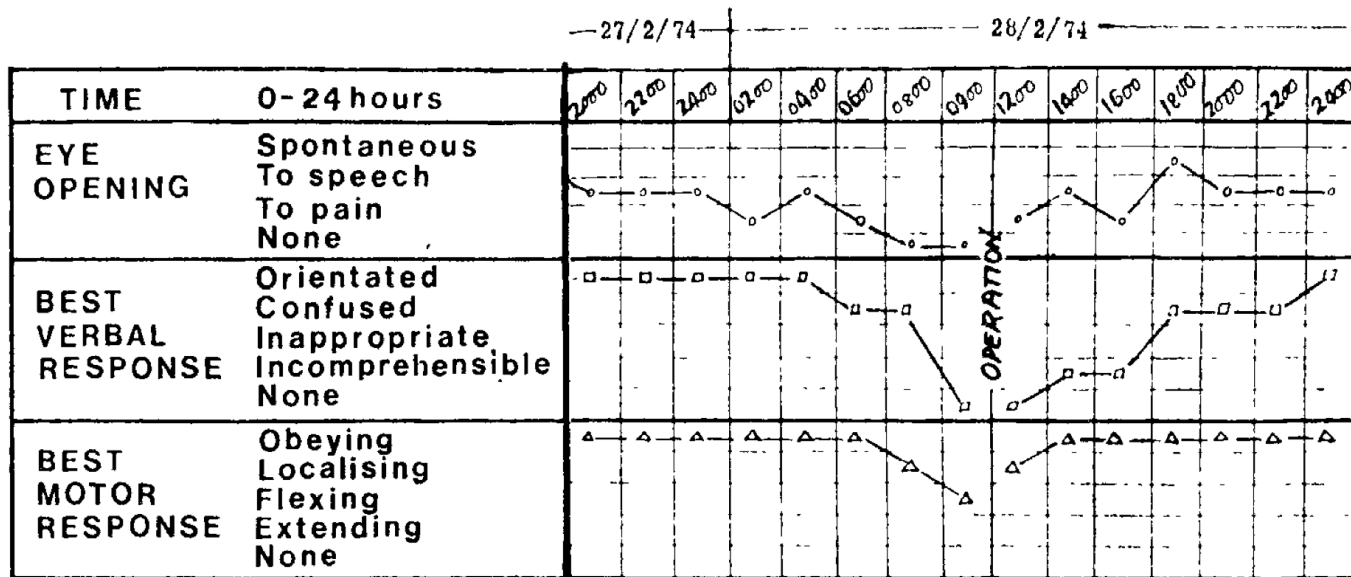
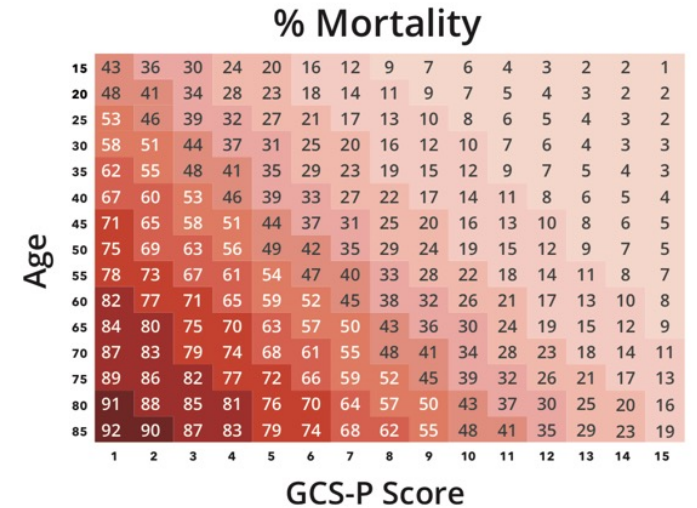
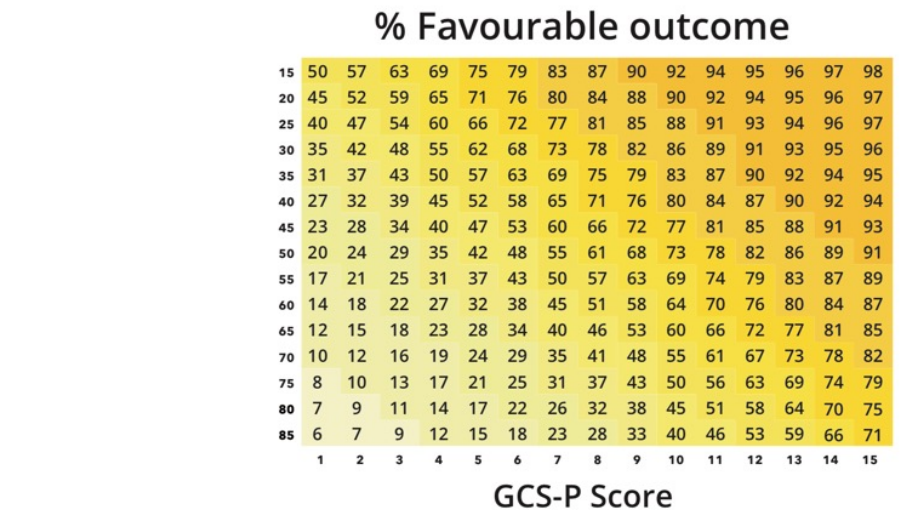


Chart for recording assessment of consciousness.

Teasdale G, Jennett B. Assessment of coma and impaired consciousness. A practical scale. Lancet. 1974 Jul 13;2(7872):81-4.



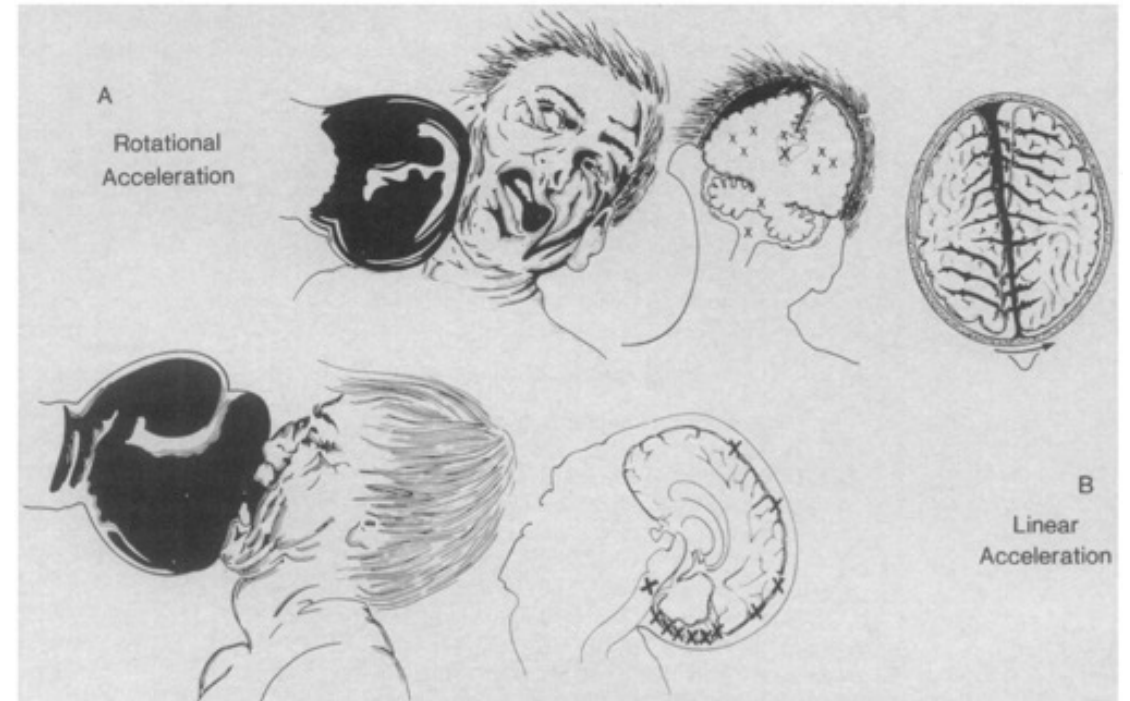
Murray, Brennan, Teasdale. Simplifying the use of prognostic information in traumatic brain injury. Part 2: Graphical presentation of probabilities. J Neurosurgery 2018 128(6):1621-1634

Acute TBI: classification

Criteria	Mild (“concussion”)	Moderate	Severe
Structural imaging	Normal	Normal or abnormal	Normal or abnormal
Loss of Consciousness (LOC)	0-30 min	> 30 min and < 24 hr	> 24 hr
Alteration of consciousness/mental state (AOC)	a moment up to 24 hr	> 24 hours. Severity based on other criteria	
Post-traumatic amnesia (PTA)	0-1 day	> 1 and < 7 d	> 7 d
Glasgow Coma Scale (best available score in first 24 hours)	13-15	9-12	< 9

Biomechanics of TBI: kinematics

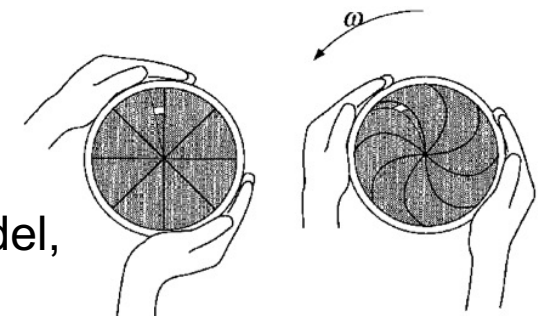
- Kinematics: branch of mechanics concerned with motion of objects without reference to forces cause
- Relative contribution of forces/acceleration to TBI determine maximal force location (and force gradient)
- Skull bending, fracture (local injury) and rotation (diffuse injury) are thought to be more important to brain injury



Lampert PW, Hardman JM. Morphological changes in brains of boxers. JAMA 1984;251:2676-9.

Impact forces:

1. Linear – easier to understand
2. Rotational – hard to model, likely more important



McLean et al., Biomechanics of closed head injury, Head injury: pathophysiology and management. 2nd edition

Biomechanics of TBI: stress concentration

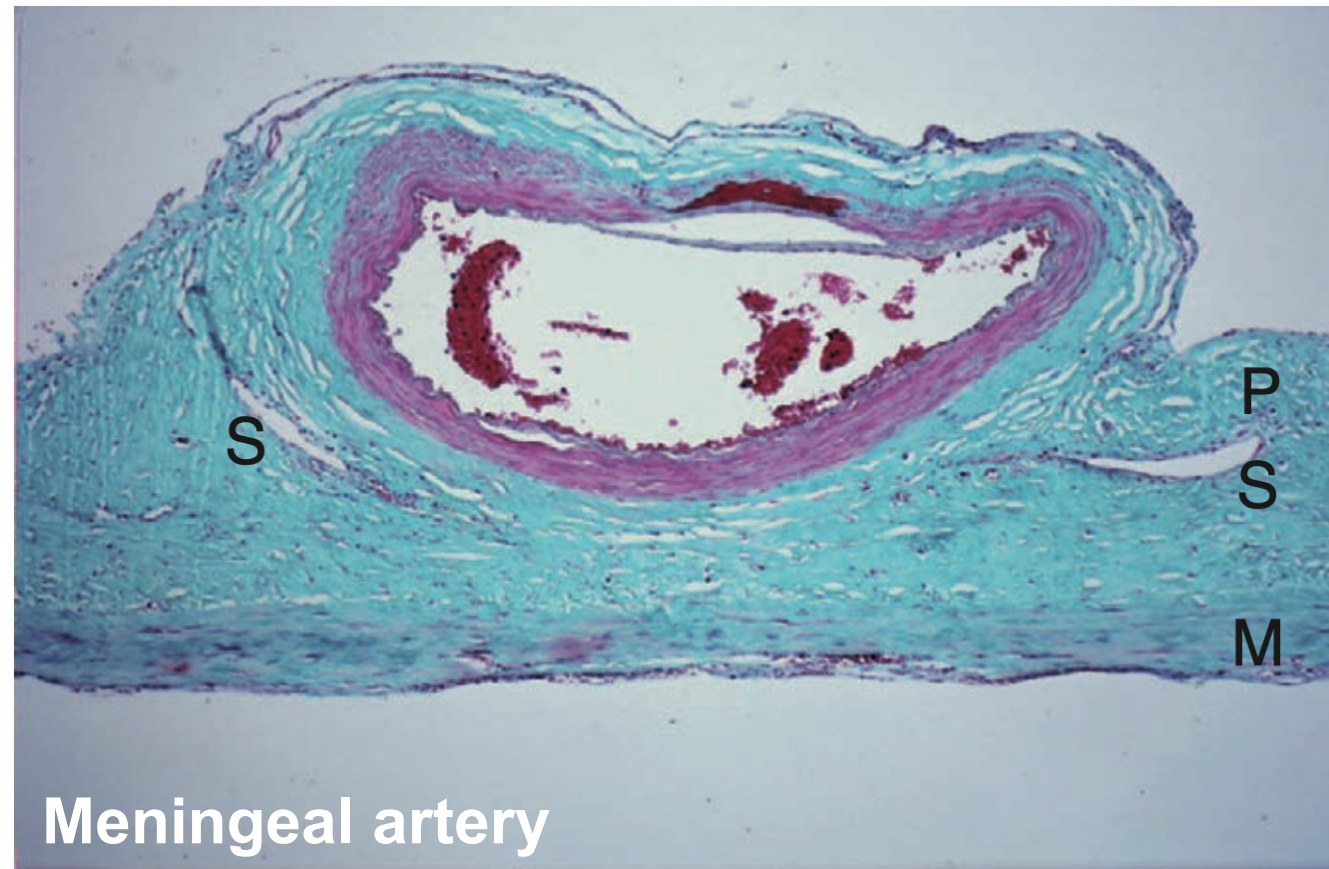
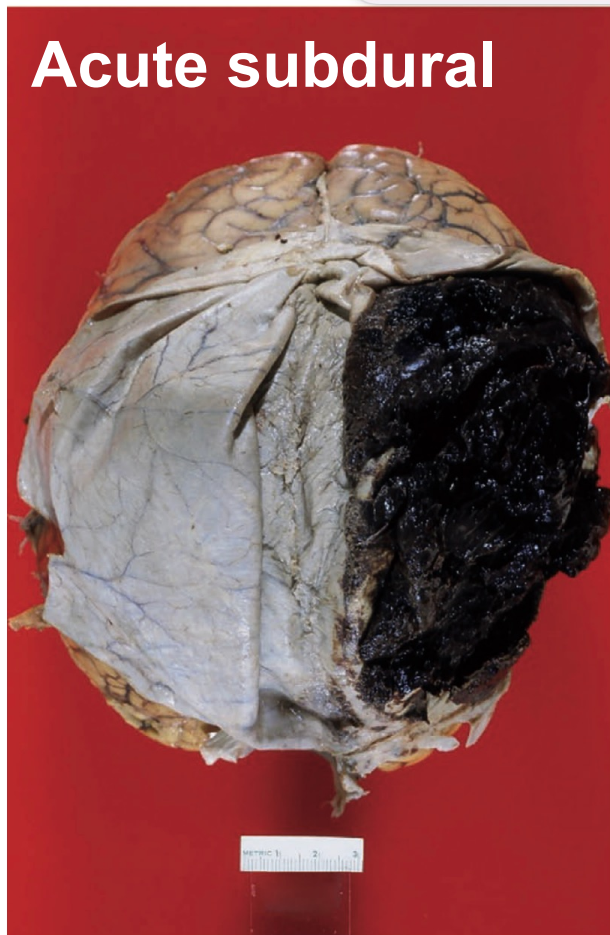
- Stress concentration: point where the stress is greater than its surrounding area from irregularities in geometry or the material structure. An object is stronger when force is evenly distributed: a reduction in area results in a localized increase in stress.
- Strain: measure of deformation of the material. A material can fail when a concentrated stress exceeds the material's theoretical cohesive strength.



Acute TBI: focal lesions

- Moderate to severe localized to distinct compartments
- Hematomas
 - Subdural, epidural, intraparenchymal
 - Local damage, reduced blood flow, ischemia, and edema
- Contusions
 - Hemorrhages at sites of impact with bony prominences
 - Common in frontal and temporal lobe, typically crests of gyri (white matter if severe)
 - Coup and countre coup
- Hemorrhage causes ischemia, edema, and necrosis with cavitation and gliosis
- Diagnosis: Imaging (CT for blood) and biomarkers (e.g., GFAP)

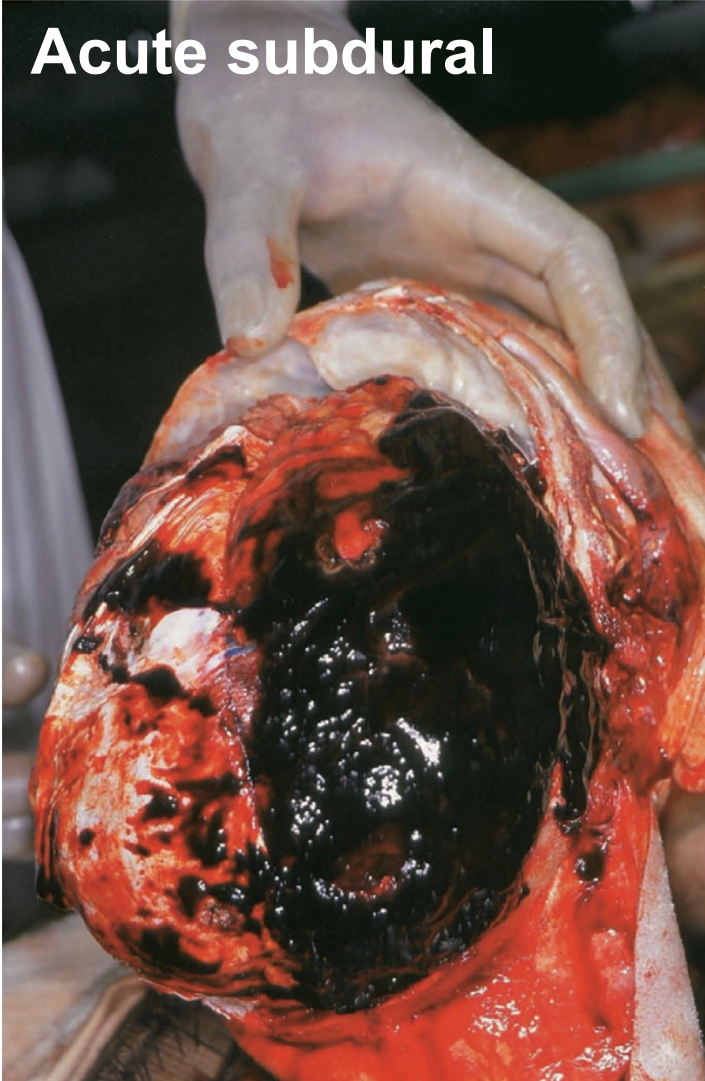
Epidural hematoma



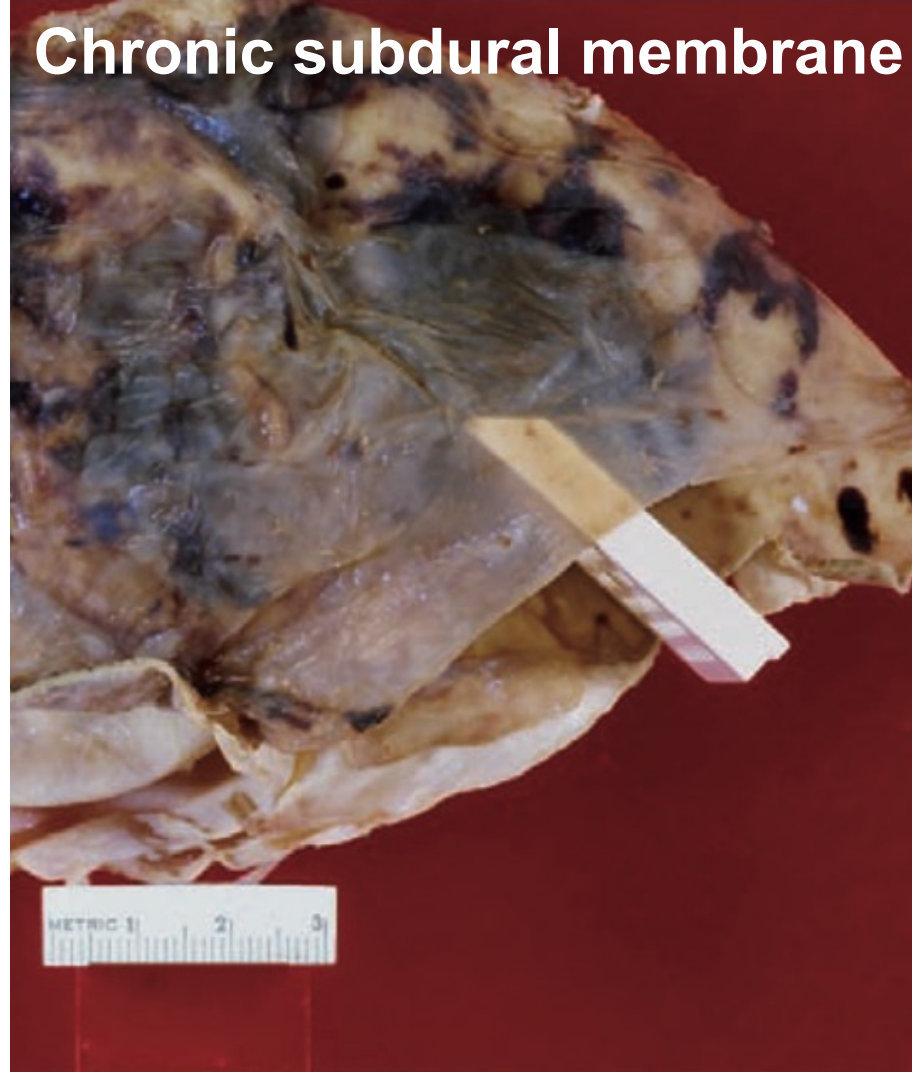
P Periosteal layer
S Dural sinus
M Meningeal layer

Subdural hematoma

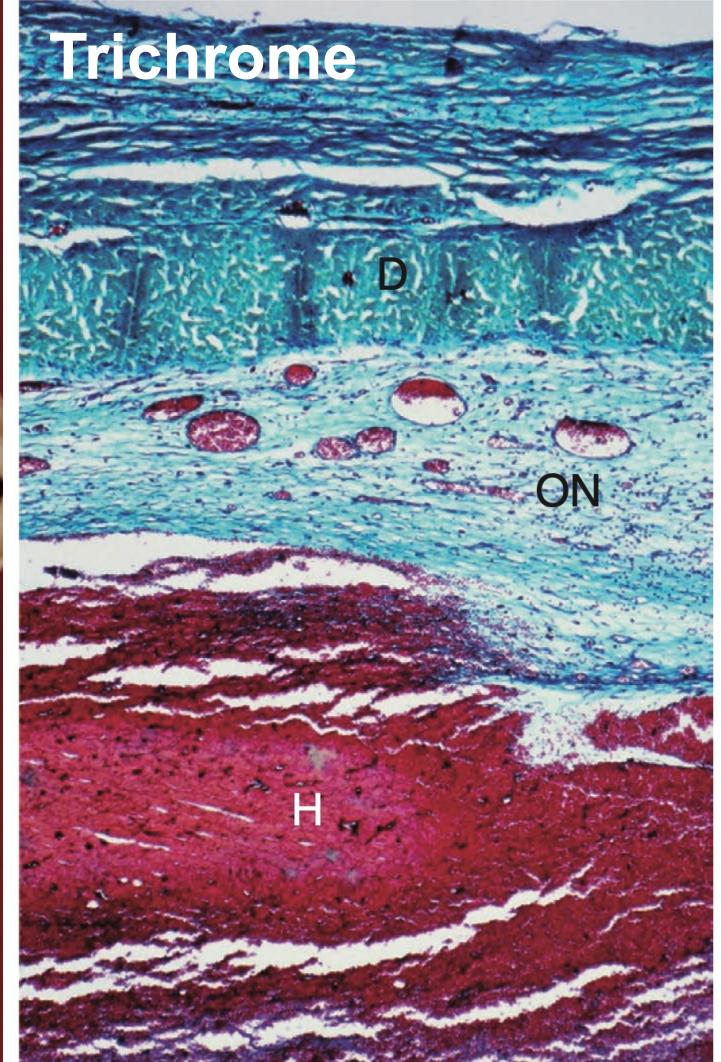
Acute subdural



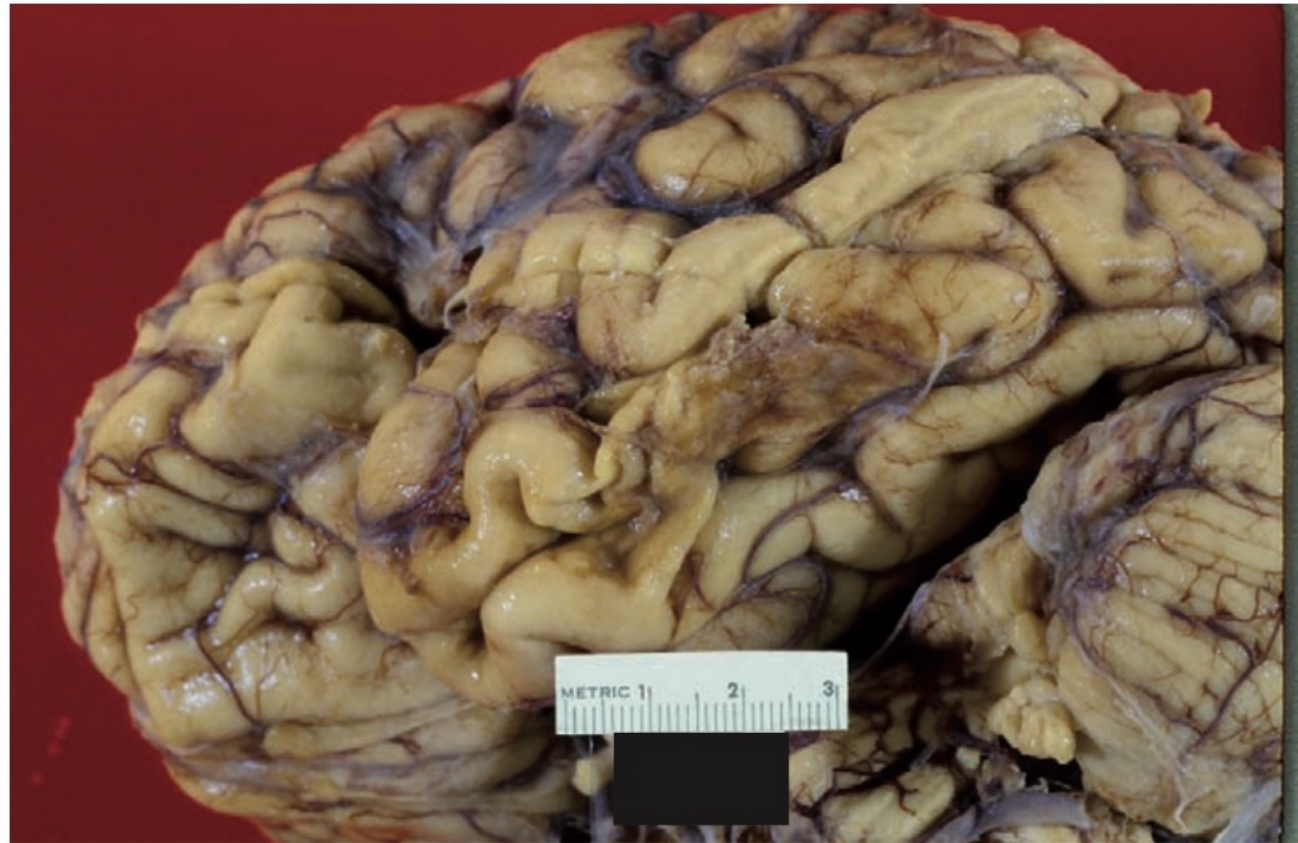
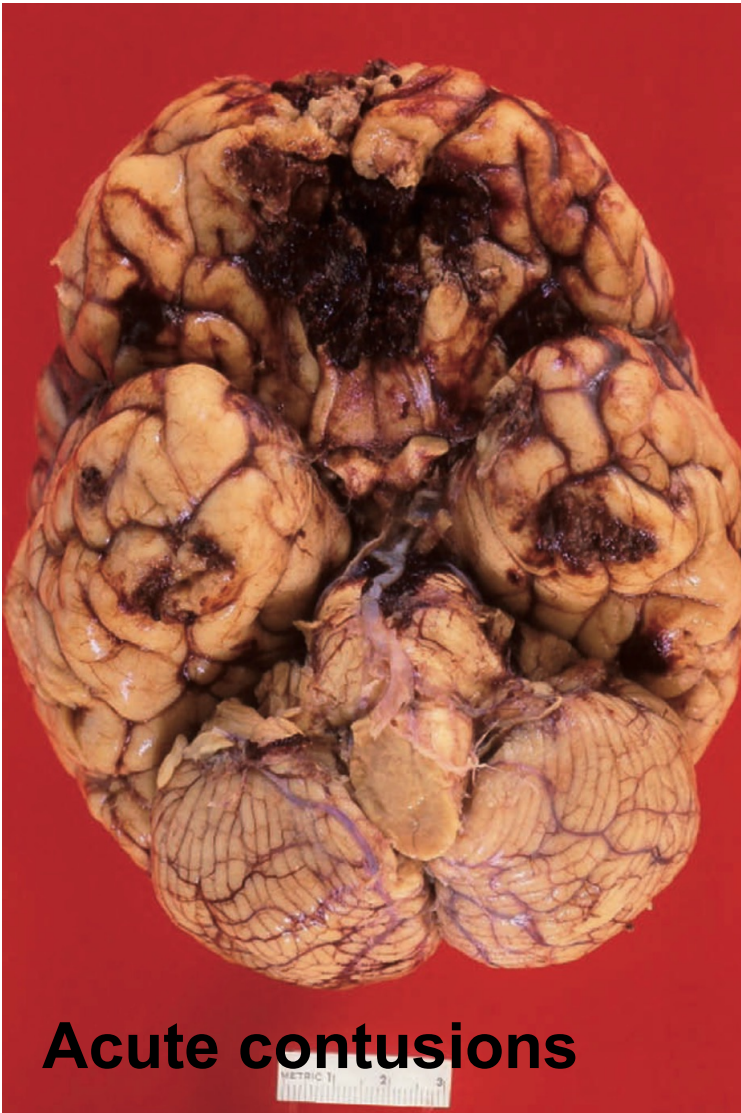
Chronic subdural membrane



Trichrome



Contusions



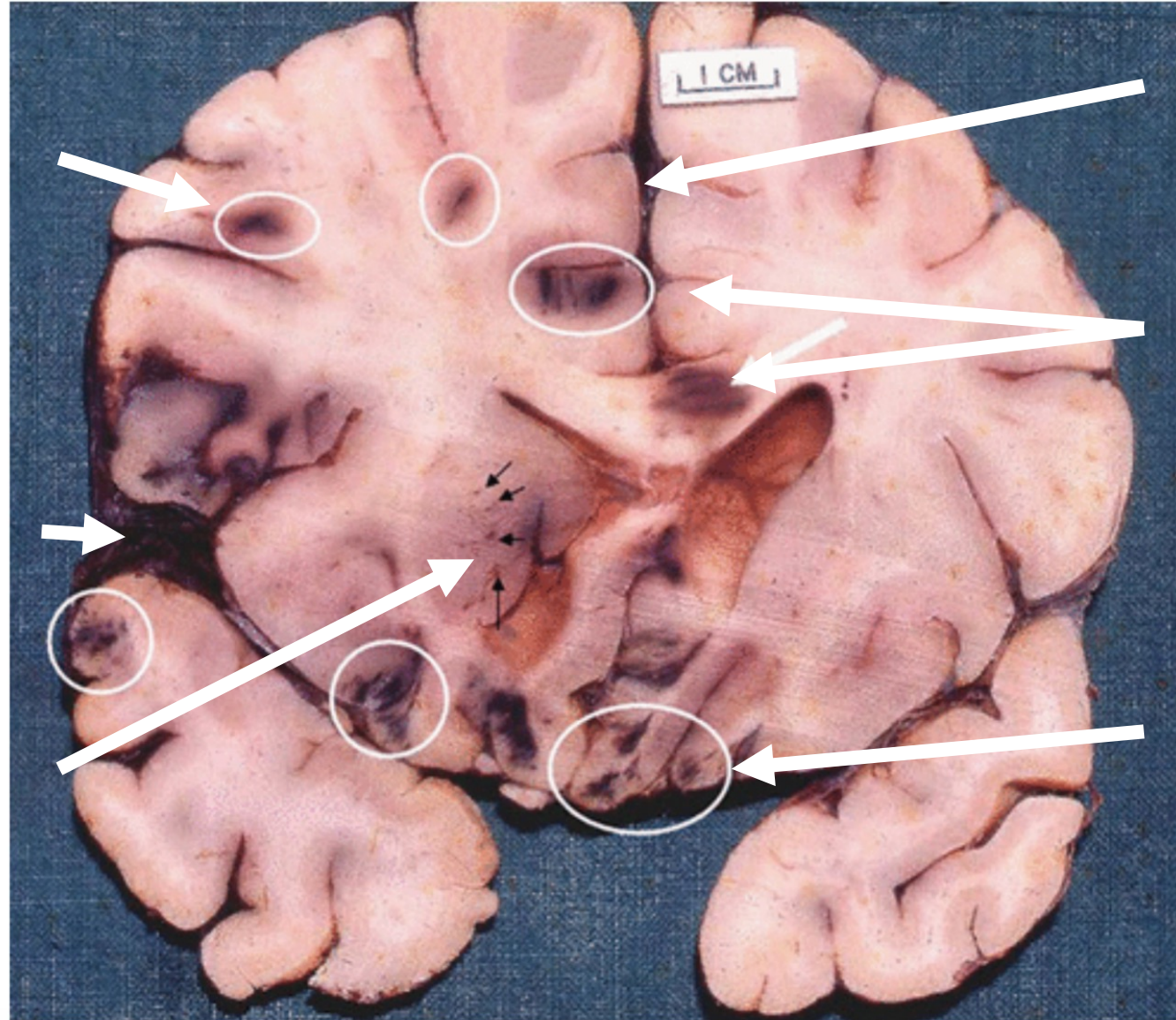
Chronic contusion

Severe TBI

Hemorrhages at gray/white matter junction (rotational)

Subarachnoid hemorrhage

Petechial hemorrhages in the basal ganglia



Swelling and midline shift

Hemorrhagic shear in the corpus callosum and cingulate

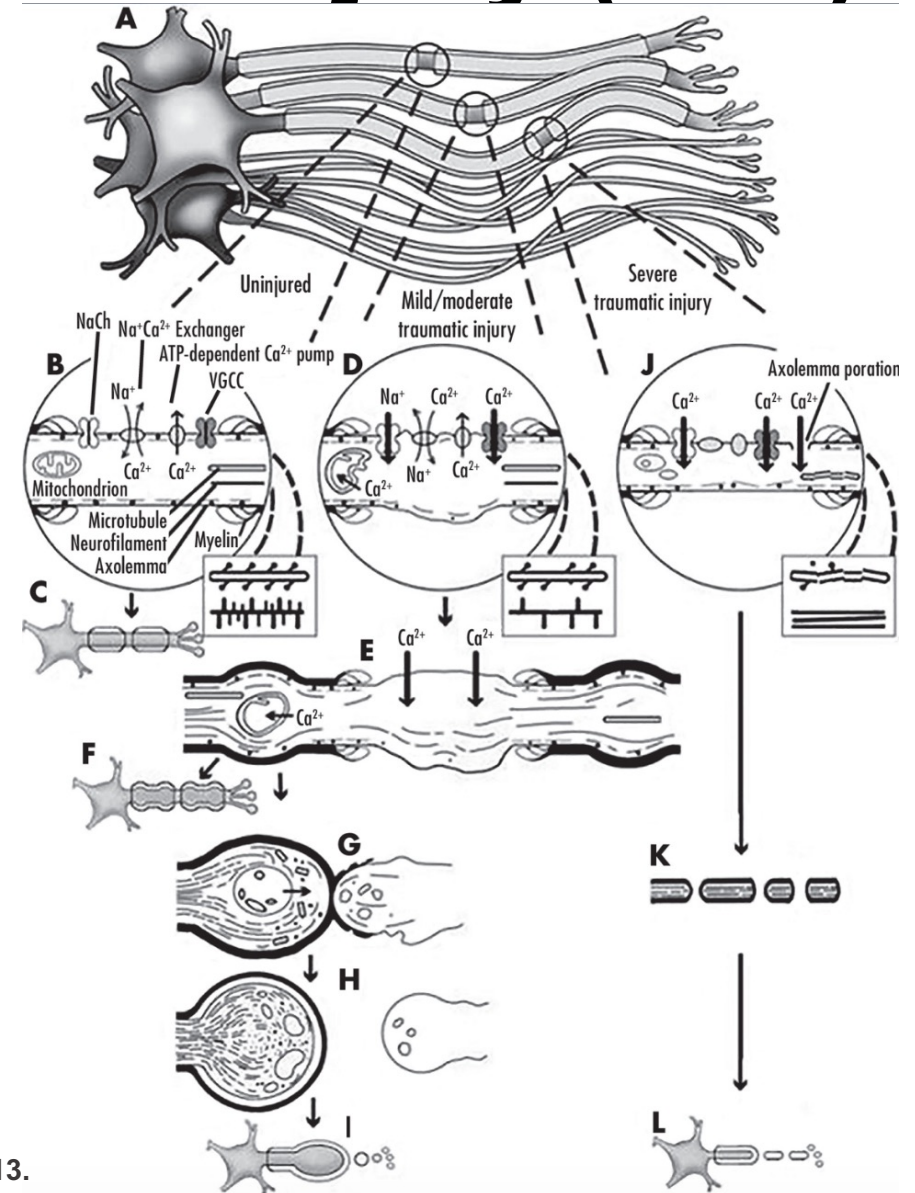
Hemorrhages at the surface (skull interface)

Acute TBI: diffuse injury

- Mild to severe TBI
- Shows a more widespread distribution
- Animal and human studies have highlighted
 - Diffuse axonal injury (DAI): shear forces disrupt axons, “spheroid” formation, axons degenerate and fragment, then neurons undergo Wallerian degeneration
 - Diffuse vascular injury (DVI): Microvasculature more resistant than axons (seen in severe fatal head injuries), results in multiple small hemorrhages and damage to the BBB

Microscopic: diffuse axonal injury (DAI)

- Axons are the most vulnerable, but DAI also includes the constellation of effects on neurons, glia, blood vessels and neuronal networks
- Stretch deformation of axolemma, microtubules axonal neurofilaments
- Leads to membrane damage
- Physiologic (metabolic and ionic): altered permeability, ionic (Ca^{2+}) dysregulation, impaired axonal transport, evoking sublethal or lethal cellular damage (secondary axotomy)



Acute TBI: cellular mechanisms

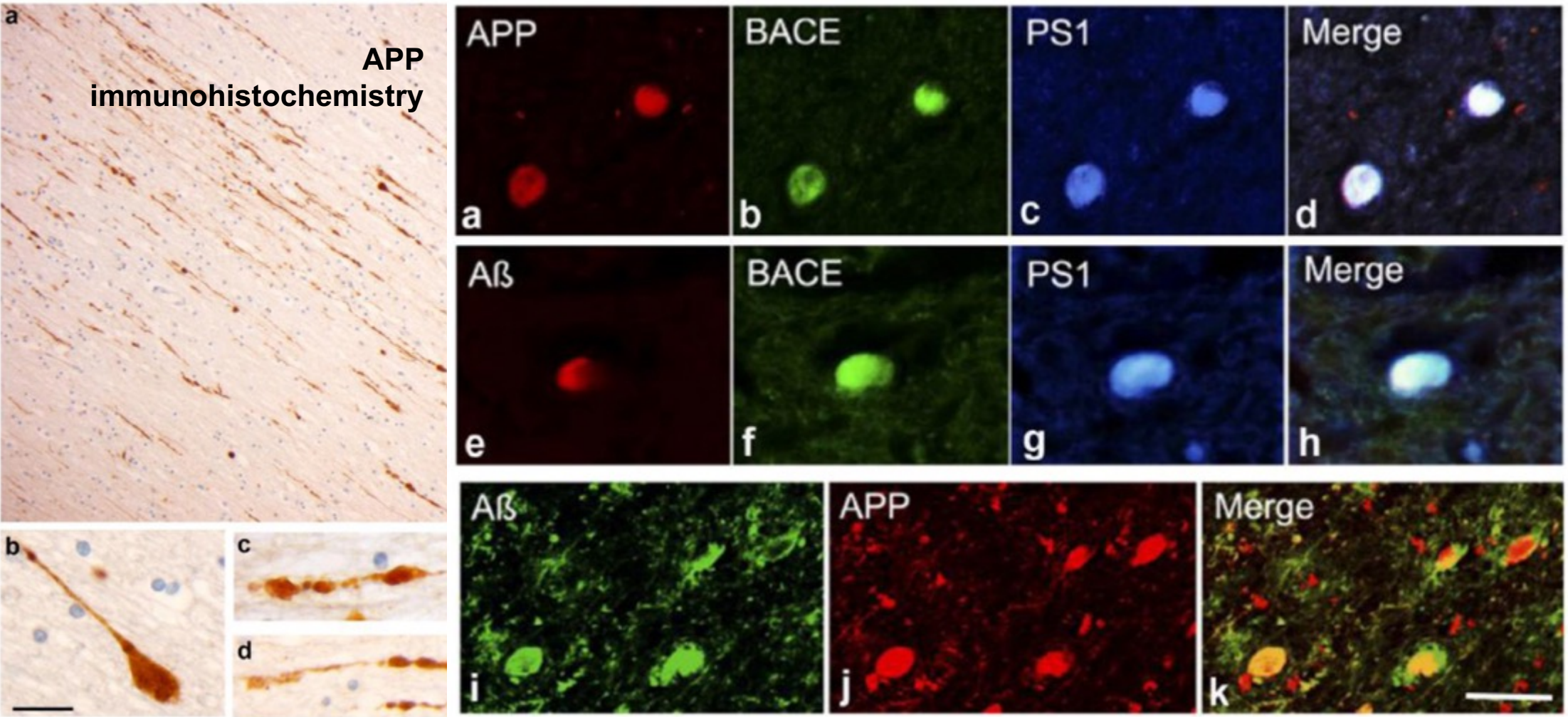
Excitotoxicity

- Glutamate surge: rapid increase in extracellular glutamate from excessive release, leakage, extravasation from disruption of the BBB and reduced astrocyte reuptake
- Causes excessive stimulation, high extracellular K^+ and intracellular Na^+/Ca^{2+} , release of Ca^{2+} from intracellular stores
- Triggers a metabolic crisis and energy failure following failed restoration of homeostasis via increased ATP-dependent pumps
- High Ca^{2+} activates Ca^{2+} dependent proteases (calpains/caspases), generation of reactive oxygen/nitrogen species and mitochondrial impairment triggering apoptosis

Wallerian degeneration

- Phenomena unique to CNS when a nerve fiber is severed or crushed
- The axon separated from the neuron cell body degenerates distal to the injury
- Atypical cell death mechanism since neurons undergoing this process remain alive

Acute TBI: diffuse axonal injury



Chronic traumatic encephalopathy & tauopathy



Primary (non-amyloid) tauopathies

Clinical: Cognitive, movement, motor neuron, and psychiatric disorders

Neuroanatomical: Neocortex, subcortical, brainstem, spinal cord

Neurohistological: Neurons, astrocytes & oligodendrocytes

Biochemical: Tau isoform ratio, secondary modifications & filament ultrastructure

Genetic: Autosomal dominant mutations (*MAPT*), common risk alleles (17q21.31 haplotypes)

FTDP-17T (rare)

Primary age-related tauopathy (very common)
Age-related tau astrogliaopathy (very common)
Progressive supranuclear palsy (20,000)
Corticobasal degeneration (rare)
Argyrophilic grain disease (rare to common)
FTLD with Pick Bodies (rare)
Globular glial tauopathy (rare)

Chronic traumatic encephalopathy (uncommon)

Lytico-Bodig disease (ALS/PDC) of Guam (rare)

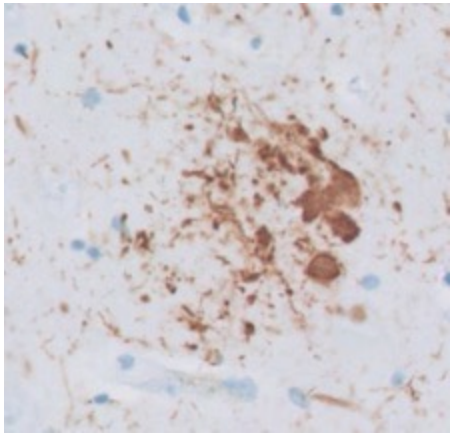
Myotonic dystrophy (20,000)

Subacute sclerosing pan-encephalitis (rare)
Postencephalitic parkinsonism (rare)

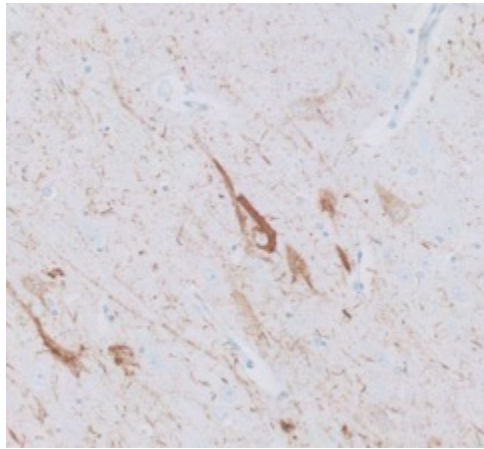
Ganglioglioma (rare)

Tauopathy: diverse neuronal & glial inclusions

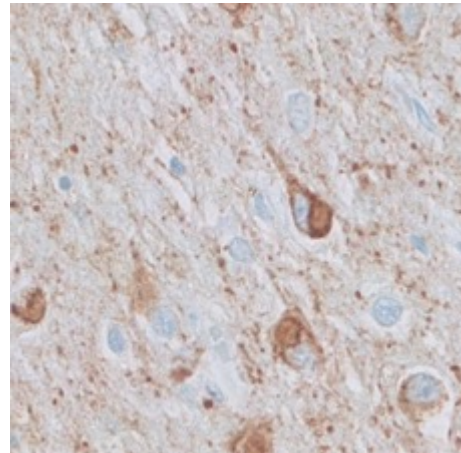
Neurons



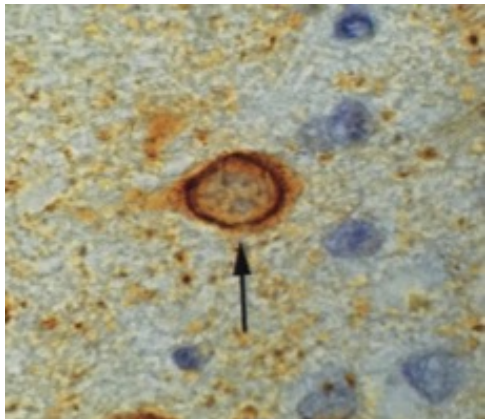
Neuritic amyloid plaque



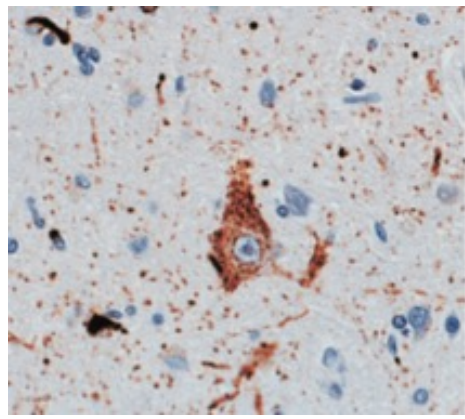
Neurofibrillary tangle



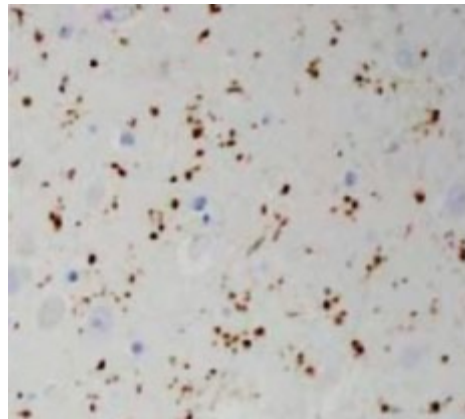
Pick body



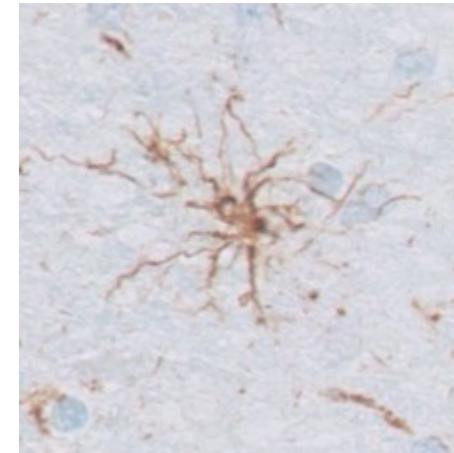
Nuclear ring



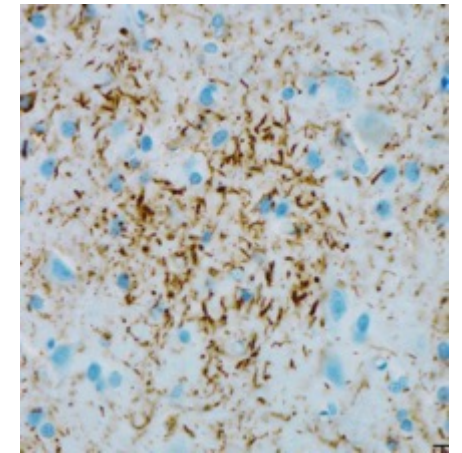
Granular cytoplasmic



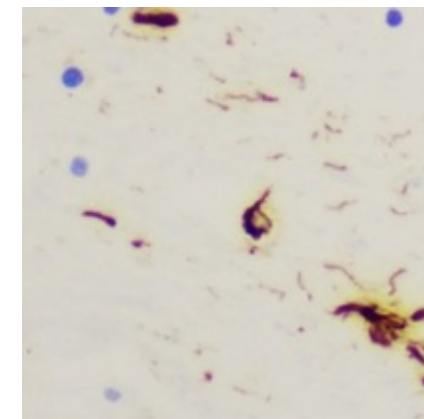
Argyrophilic grains



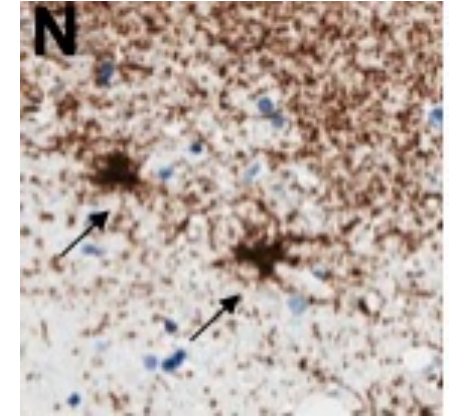
Tufted astrocyte



Astrocytic plaque



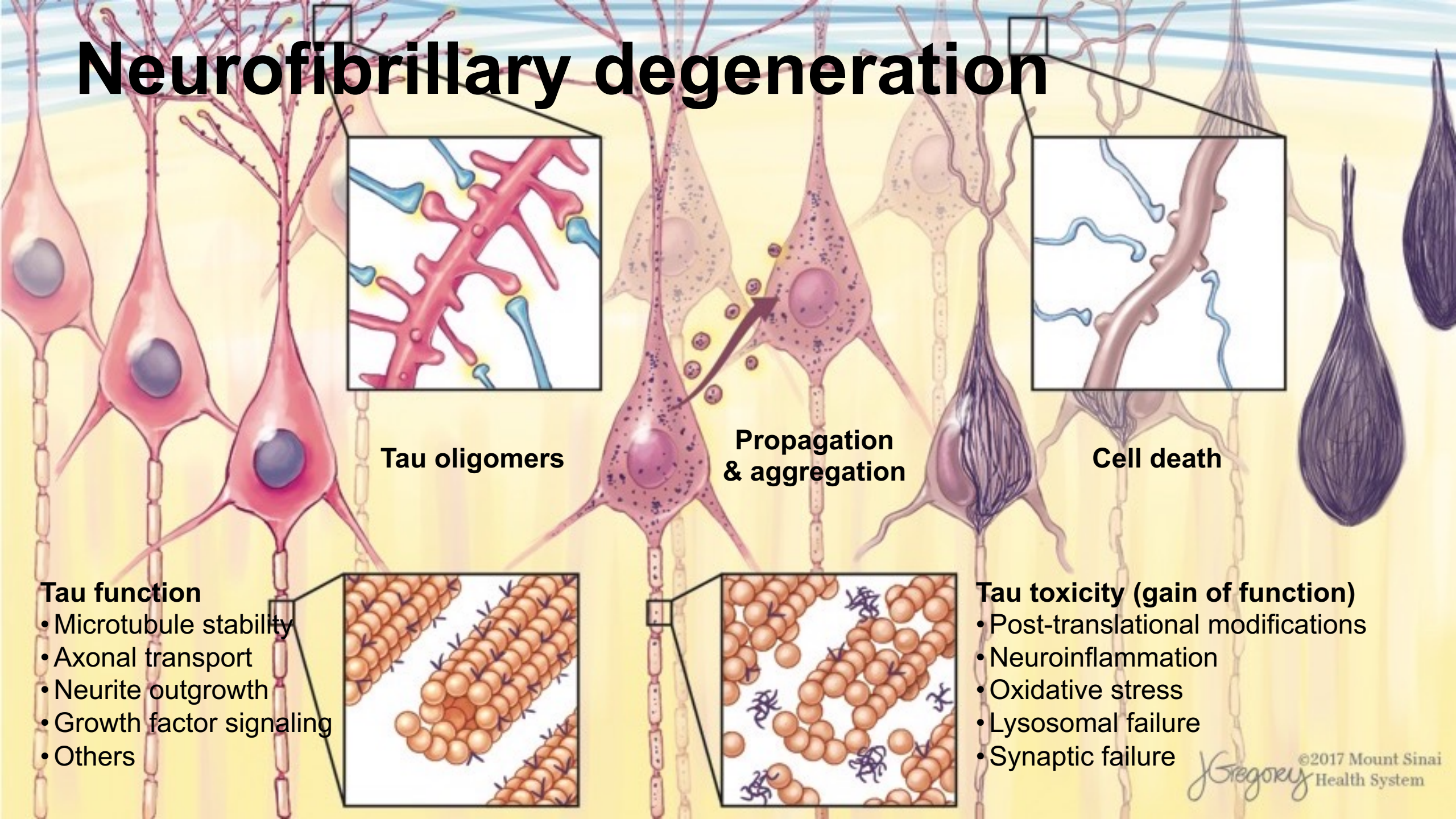
Coiled bodies



Thorn astrocyte

Abnormal hyperphosphorylated tau immunohistochemistry

Neurofibrillary degeneration



Tau oligomers

**Propagation
& aggregation**

Cell death

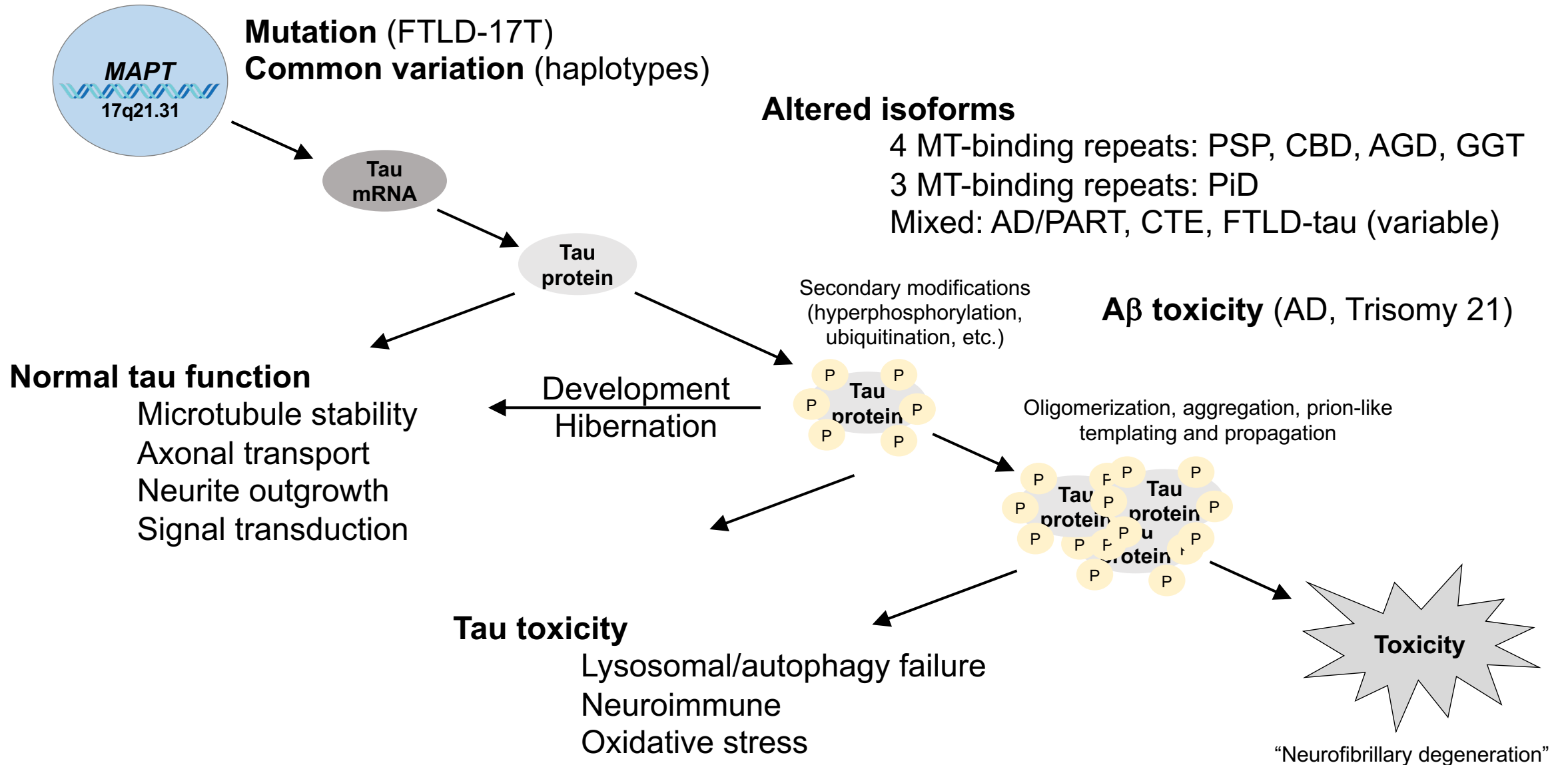
Tau function

- Microtubule stability
- Axonal transport
- Neurite outgrowth
- Growth factor signaling
- Others

Tau toxicity (gain of function)

- Post-translational modifications
- Neuroinflammation
- Oxidative stress
- Lysosomal failure
- Synaptic failure

Tauopathy: molecular & cellular mechanisms



Chronic traumatic encephalopathy (CTE)

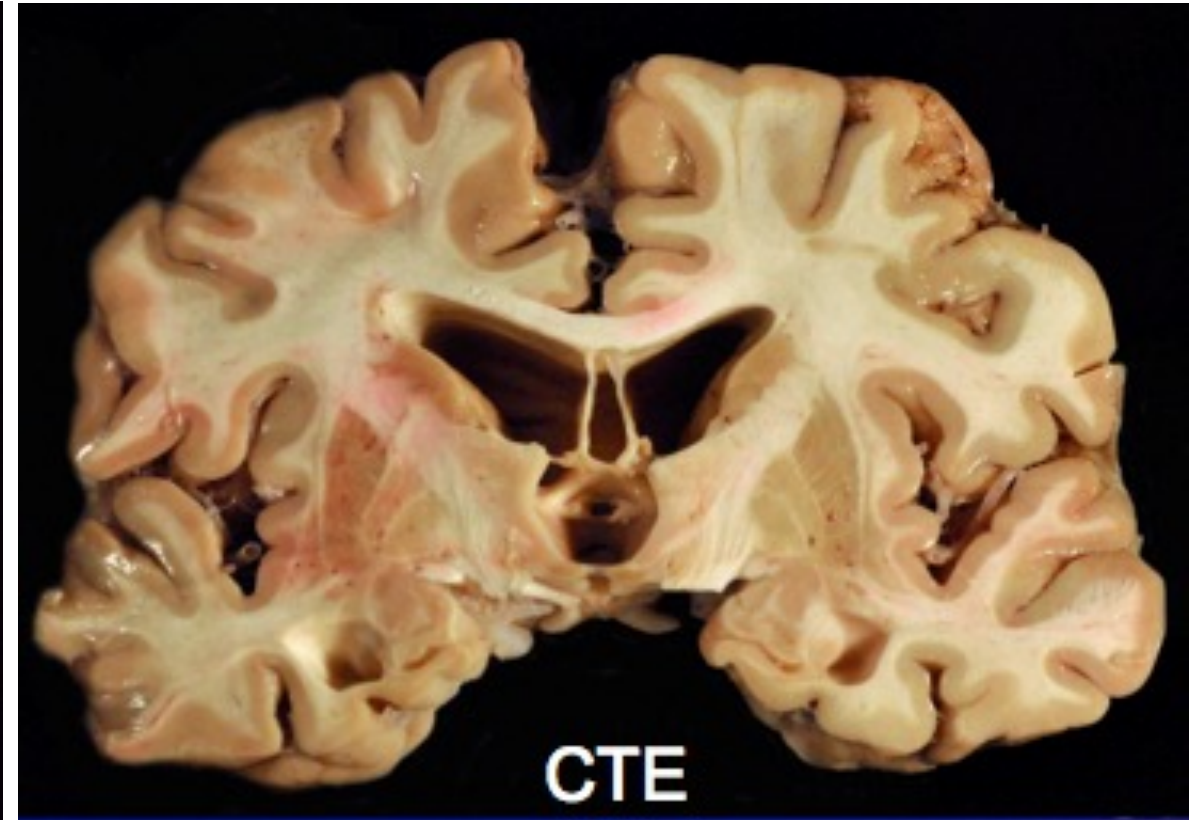
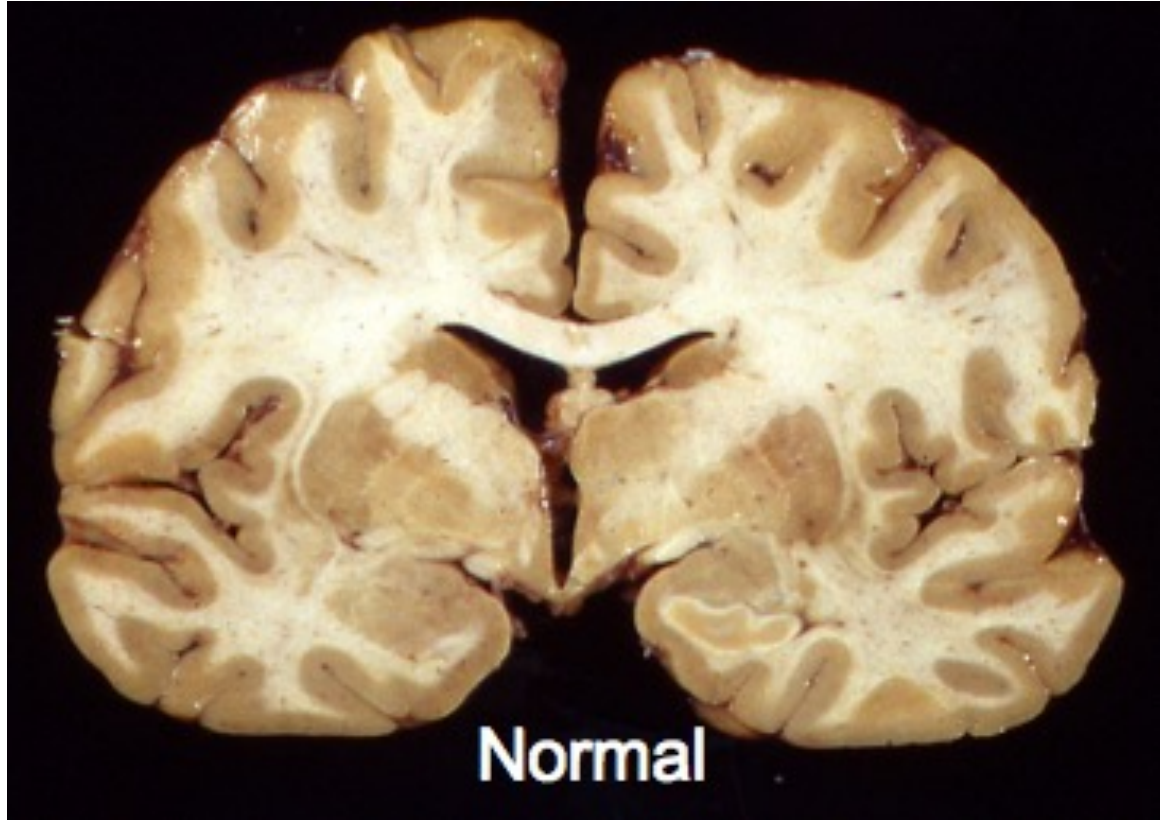
- A distinct progressive neurodegenerative disease, first described in boxers by Martland (1928)
- Later termed *dementia pugilistica*, then *chronic traumatic encephalopathy*; seen in sports, “head banging”, intimate partner violence, blast, etc.
- Caused by mild yet repetitive concussive and subconcussive injuries
- Symptoms:
 - Early memory and cognitive impairment, depression, impulse control problems and behavioral abnormalities
 - Progresses to dementia, movement disorder, motor neuron disease



Harrison S. Martland, MD, ca. 1940

Martland HS: Punch drunk. JAMA 91:1103–1107, 1928

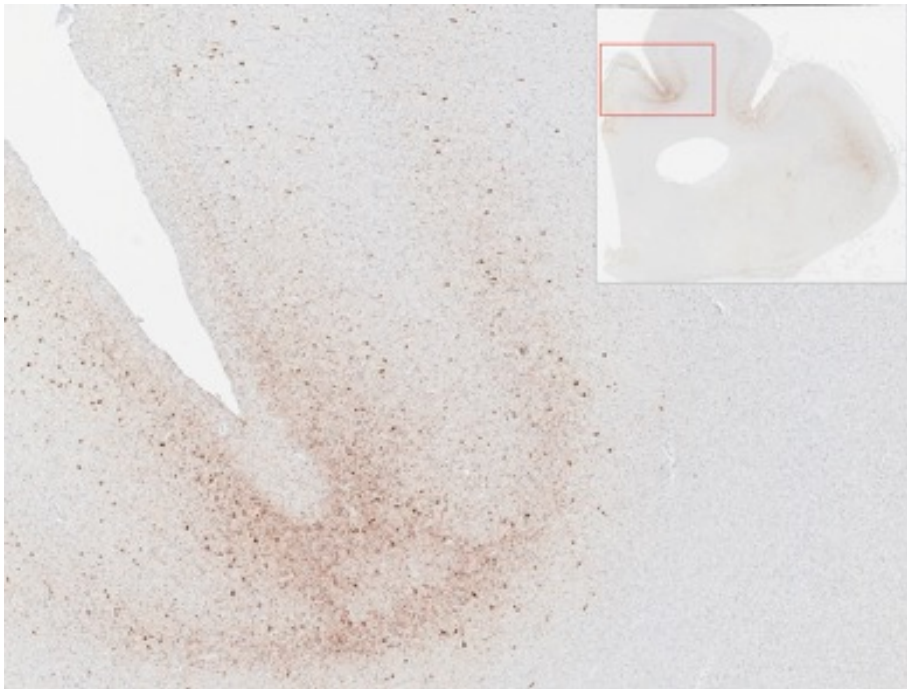
CTE: Gross neuropathology



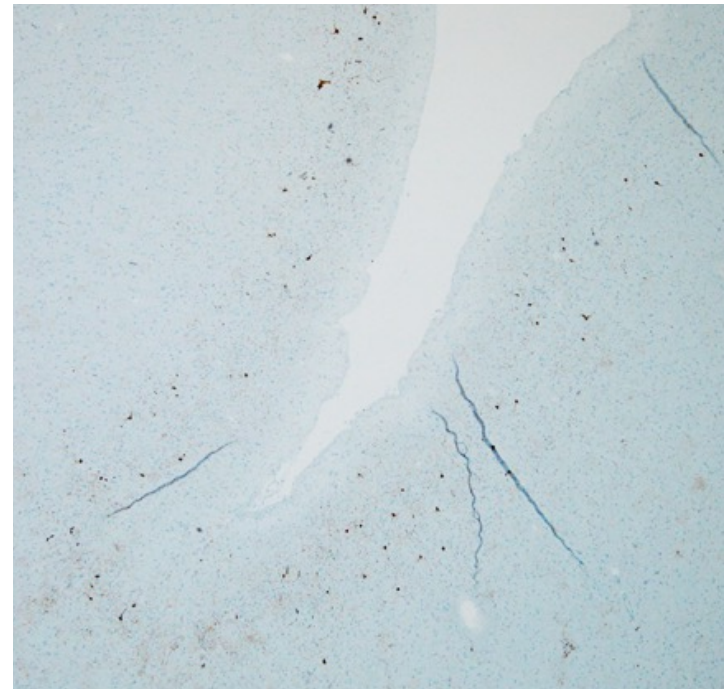
Atrophy & ventricular dilatation, cavum septum pellucidum, destruction of the mammillary bodies, substantia nigra & locus coeruleus pallor, callosal thinning

CTE: Microscopic neuropathology

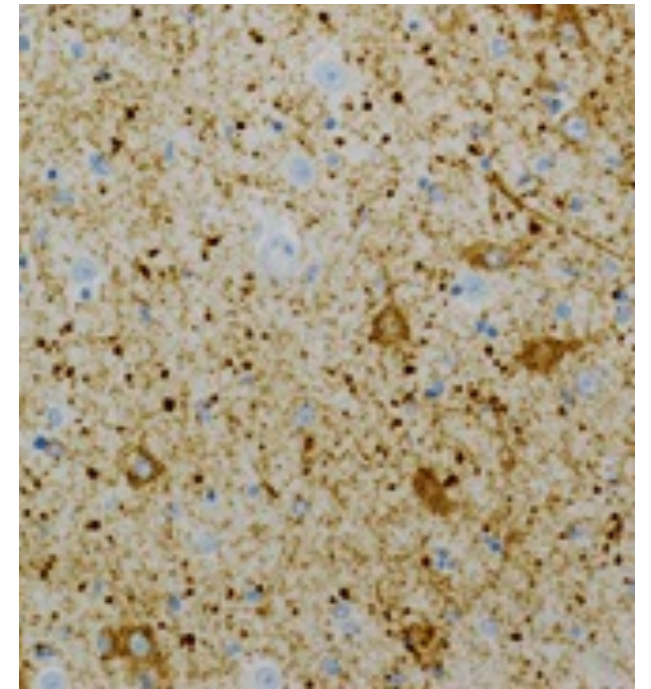
P-tau immunohistochemistry (AT8)



Sulcal predominance



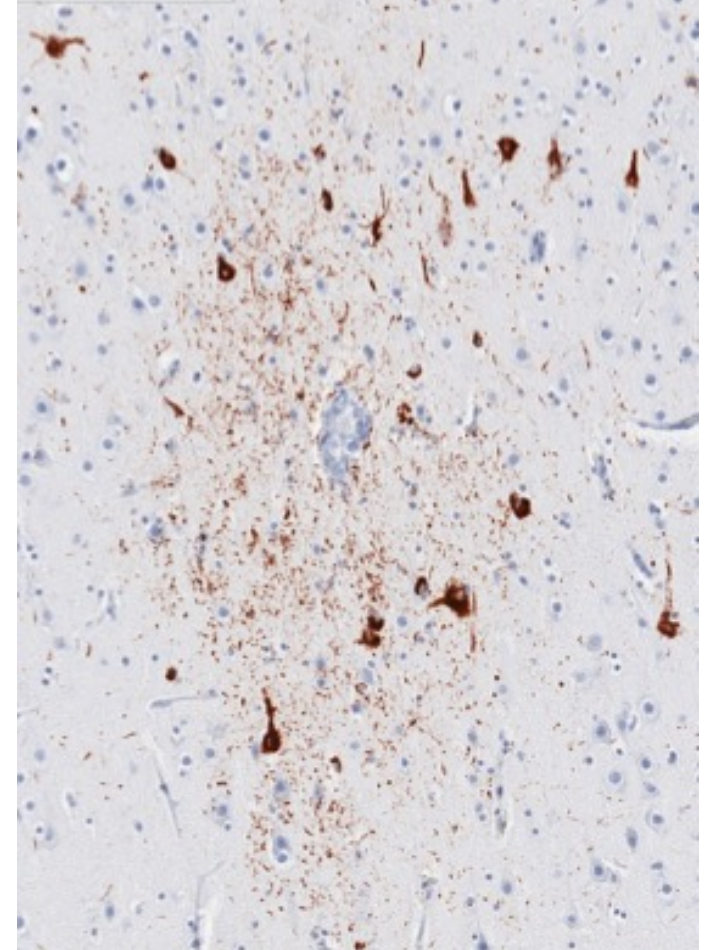
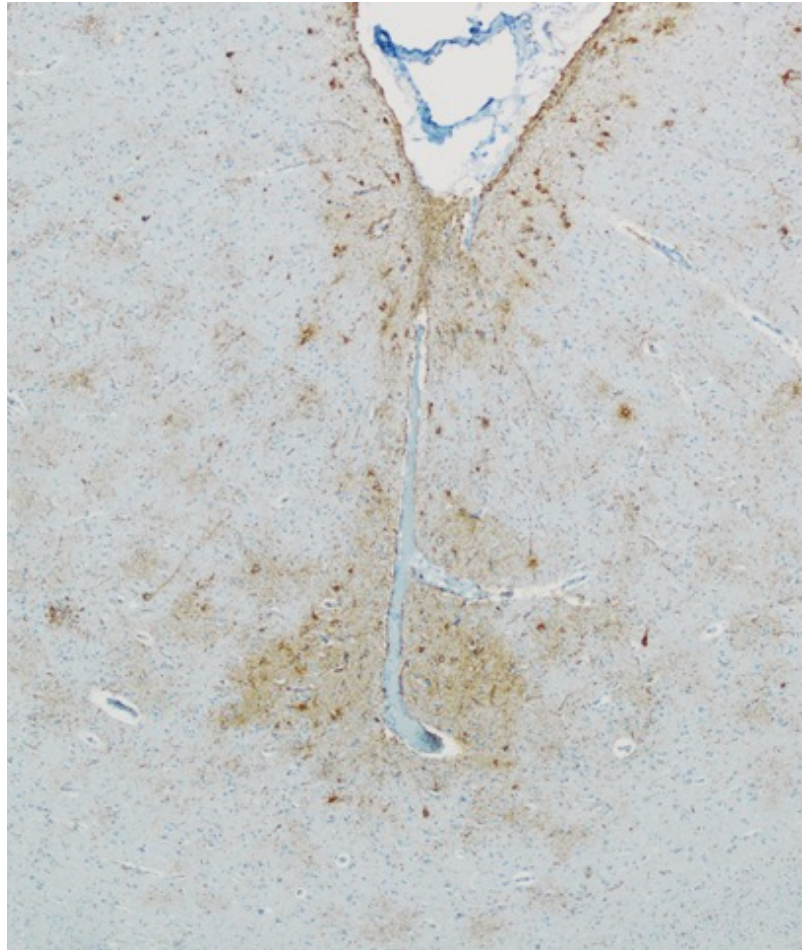
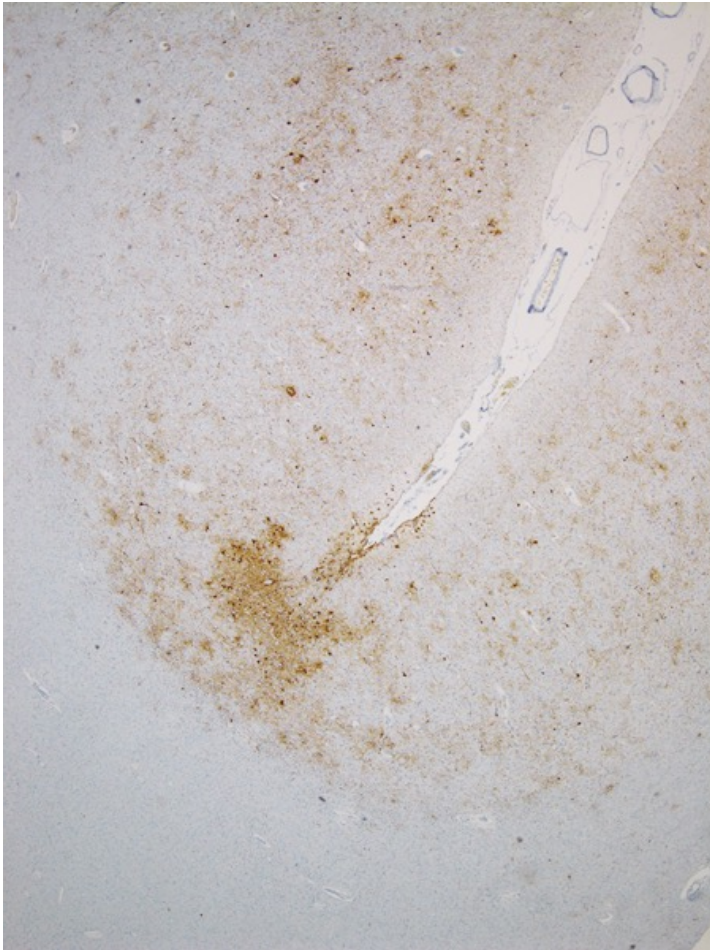
Superficial tangles (temporal)



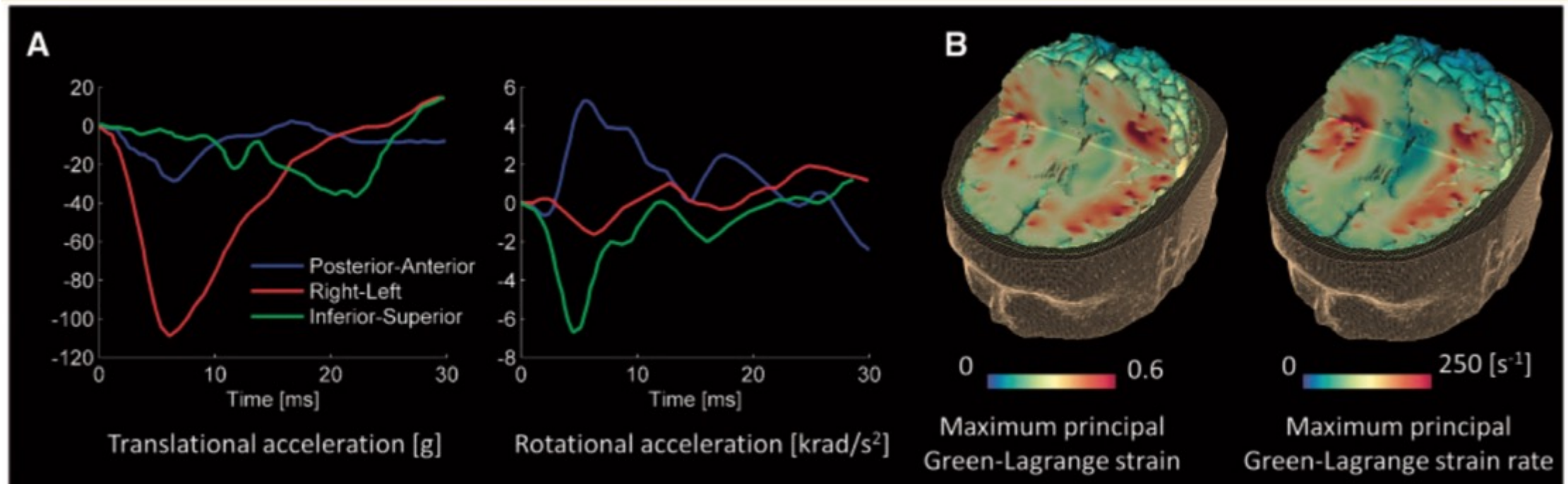
Grains (amygdala)

CTE: Microscopic neuropathology

Pathognomonic lesion examples (p-tau IHC)



CTE: biomechanics



- The computational models predict large strain at the depths of sulci
- The volume of sulcal regions exceeding brain injury thresholds significantly larger than gyral regions

Mixed pathology in CTE

- Polyproteinopathy: common
- TDP-43
 - Hippocampal sclerosis/LATE
- A β plaques (diffuse or neuritic) in 52%
- Synucleinopathy

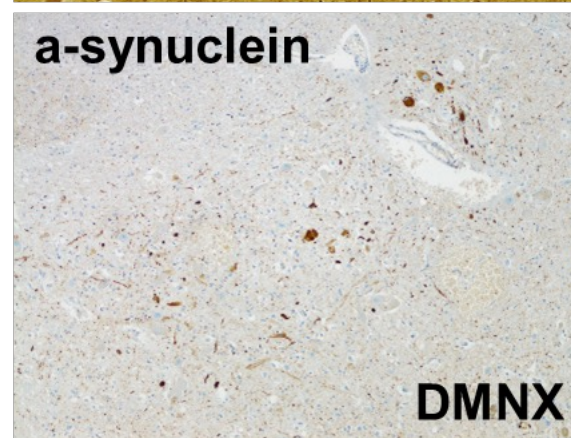
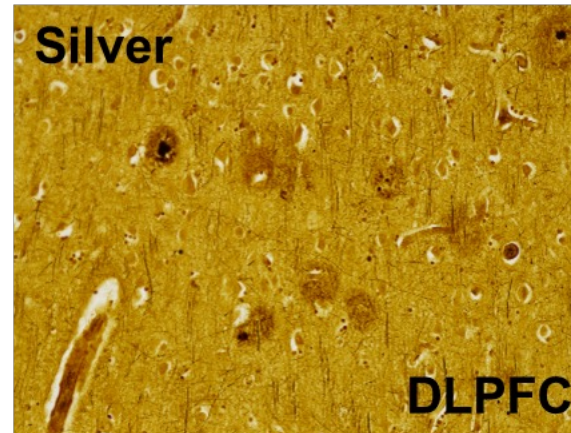
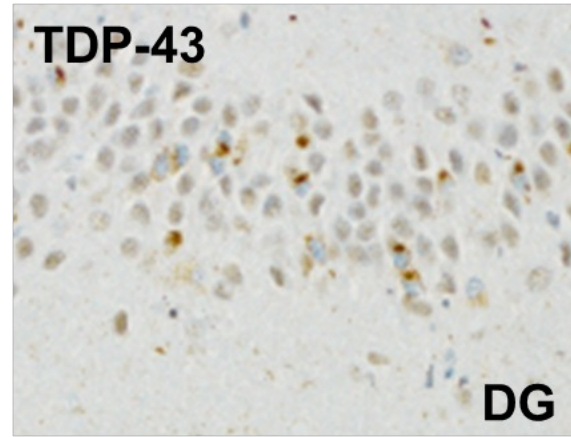


TABLE 1. Descriptive Characteristics of Brain Donors (n = 571)

Variable	Mean (SD) or n (%)
Age at death, yr, median [IQR] [range]	65.0 [46.0–76.0] [18–97]
Education level	
Some high school or high school diploma/GED	38 (6.7)
Some college or college degree	383 (67.1)
More than college or graduate degree	150 (26.3)
Male sex	565 (98.9)
Race	
White	466 (81.6)
Black/African American	87 (15.2)
Other race	18 (3.2)
Contact sports	
Neurodegenerative pathology	
CTE, stages III–IV	246 (43.1)
TDP-43 inclusions	137 (24.0)
Alzheimer disease	107 (18.7)
Hippocampal sclerosis	96 (16.8)
Neocortical Lewy bodies	34 (6.0)
FTLD-TDP	24 (4.2)
FTLD-tau	24 (4.2)
Cerebrovascular pathology	
Arteriolosclerosis [mod-sev]	292 (51.1)
CAA [mod-sev]	123 (21.5)
Microinfarcts	110 (19.3)
Atherosclerosis [mod-sev]	108 (18.9)
Gross infarcts	77 (13.5)
White matter rarefaction [mod-sev]	251 (44.0)

Stein, T. D., P. H. (2015). "Beta-amyloid deposition in chronic traumatic encephalopathy." Acta Neuropathol.

Saltiel et al. Relative Contributions of Mixed Pathologies to Cognitive and Functional Symptoms in Brain Donors Exposed to Repetitive Head Impacts. Ann Neurol. 2023 Nov 3

CTE: Diagnostic consensus criteria

Required (pathognomonic lesion)

- ✓ p-tau+ aggregates in neurons, astrocytes, and cell processes around small vessels in an irregular pattern at the depths of the cortical sulci

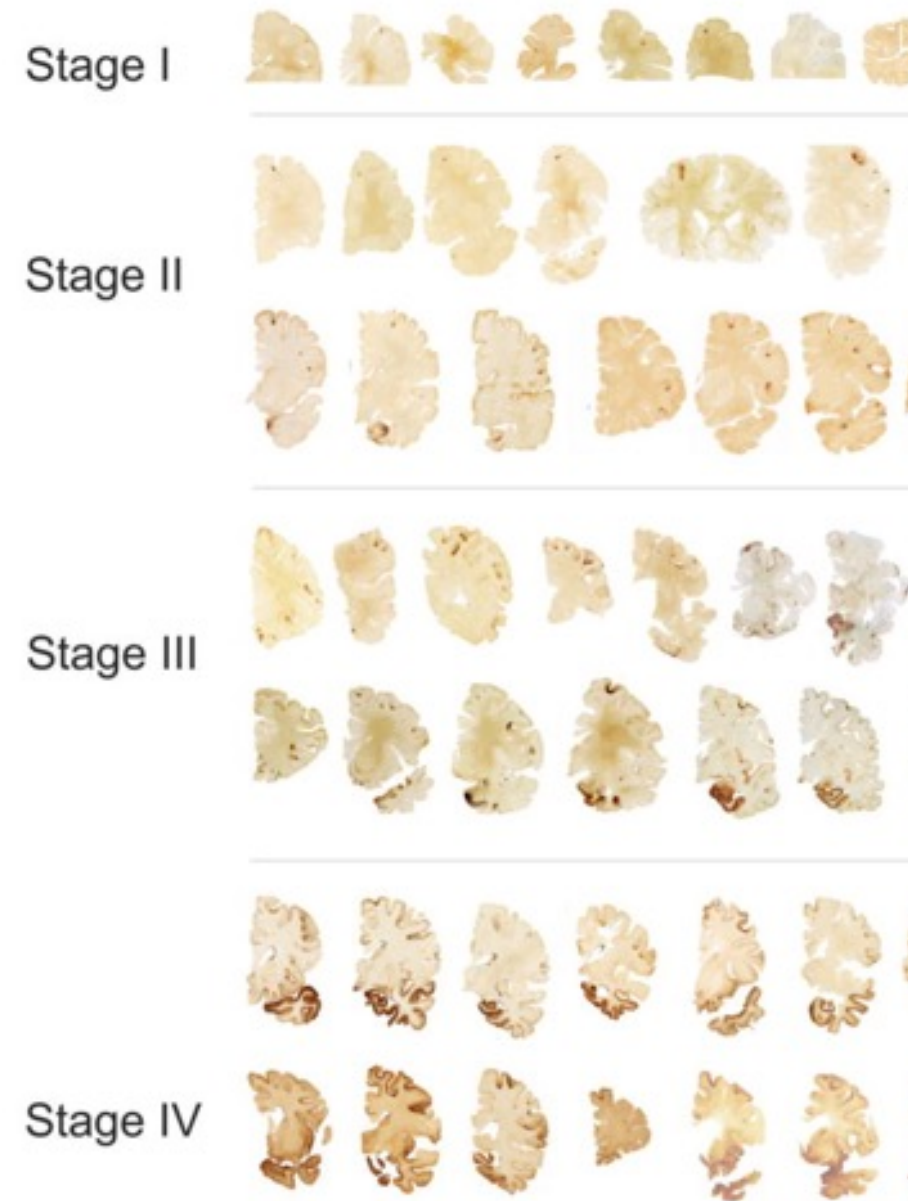
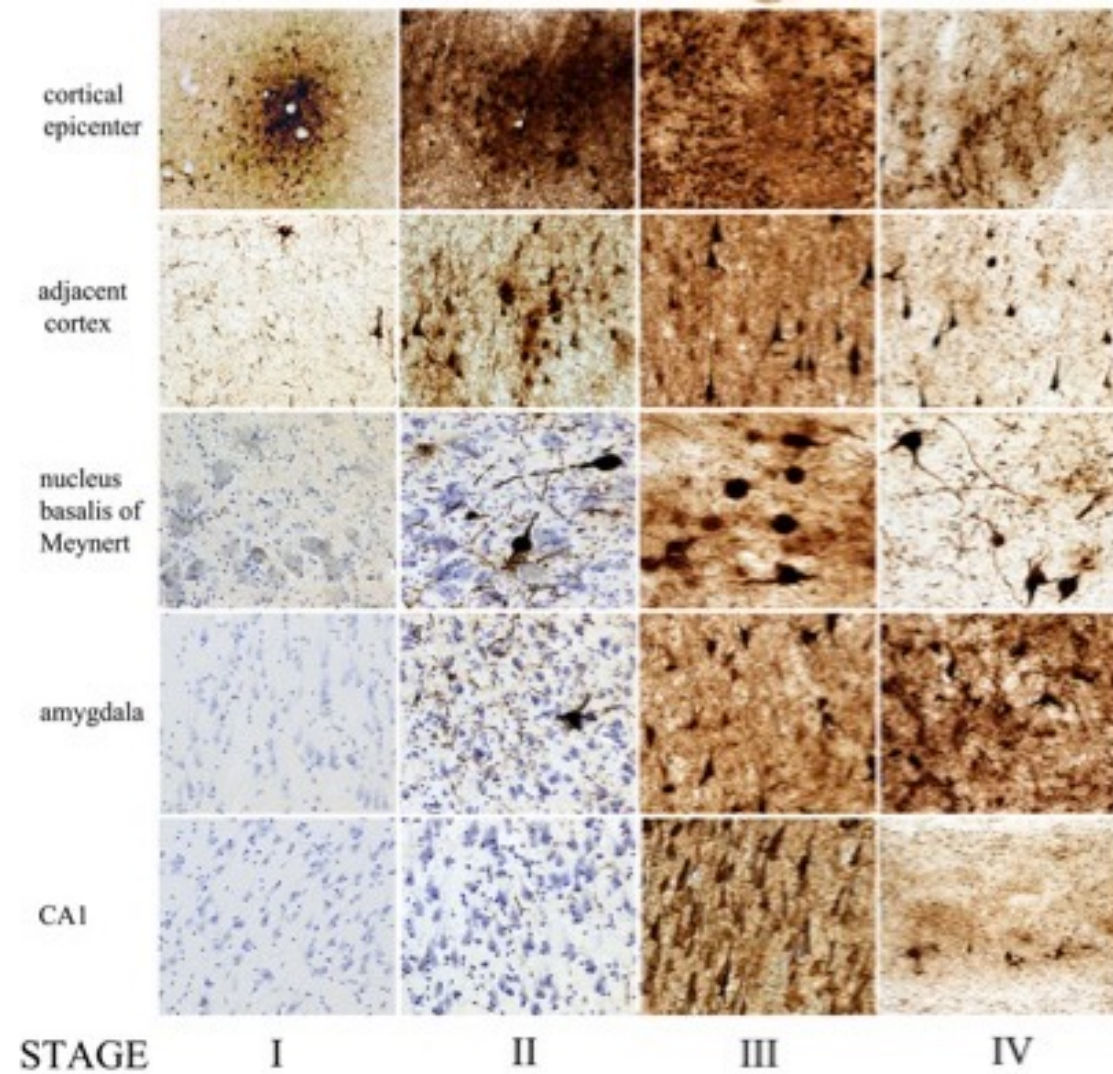
Supportive features (p-tau)

- ✓ NFTs affecting superficial layers (layers II–III)
- ✓ NFTs in CA2 and prominent proximal dendritic swellings in CA4
- ✓ p-tau+ aggregates in subcortical nuclei
- ✓ p-tau+ thorny astrocytes at the glial limitans (subpial and periventricular)
- ✓ p-tau+ large grain-like and dot-like structures

Other pathologies (non-p-tau)

- ✓ Disproportionate 3rd ventricle dilatation, septal changes, mammillary body atrophy, contusions, other signs of TBI
- ✓ TDP-43+ inclusions

CTE: staging



McKee, et al (2013). "The spectrum of disease in chronic traumatic encephalopathy." Brain 136(Pt 1): 43-64.

p-tau IHC

CTE: Controversy?

COMMENTARY

Does CTE call for an end to youth tackle football?

Despite press about a recent study, a link between hits to the head and CTE isn't clear-cut. More data and a risk-benefit analysis are needed.

By Jason Chung , Peter Cummings and Uzma Samadani | FEBRUARY 10, 2018 — 8:37AM



NOAH MUSSER • KANSAS CITY STAR/TNS

*“CTE pathology in the brain has been shown by British pathologists to be **present in approximately 12 percent of normal healthy aged people** who died at an average age of 81 years (Ling et al. Acta Neuropathologica). The presence of CTE pathology in the brain on autopsy has not been shown to correlate with neurologic symptoms before death. To be clear, CTE pathology could be present in a normal person.”*

*“The scientific evidence linking youth casual sports play to brain injury, brain injury to CTE, and CTE to dementia is **not strong**.*

*“The pathology and link between head impacts and long-term neurological conditions such as CTE is still unclear, with **questions of causation yet to be settled.**”*

CTE: Controversy?

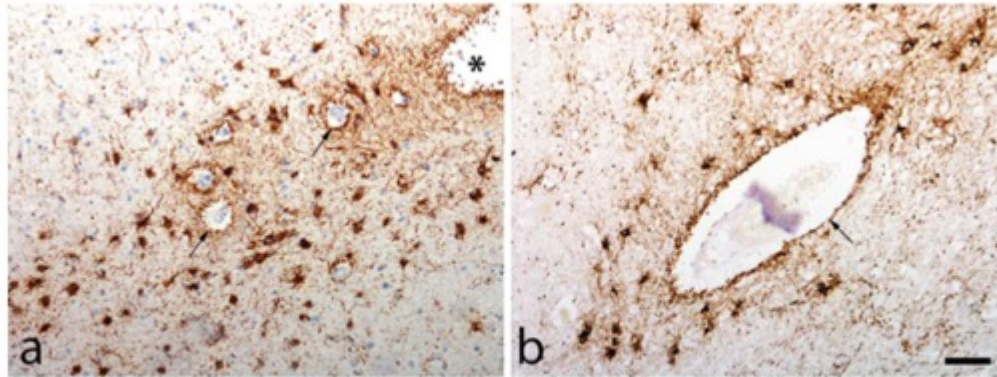


Fig. 1 Characteristic histological features of chronic traumatic encephalopathy (CTE). Abnormal perivascular accumulation of tau-immunoreactive lesions in neurons, astrocytes and neurites in an irregular pattern at the depth of the sulcus in the frontal cor-

tex [arrows pointing to blood vessels, asterisks locating at bottom of sulcus; a, b tau immunohistochemistry (AT8); bar in a 25 μ m, in b 25 μ m]

13% of normal individuals have CTE pathology?

Ling, H., J. L. Holton, K. Shaw, K. Davey, T. Lashley and T. Revesz (2015). "Histological evidence of chronic traumatic encephalopathy in a large series of neurodegenerative diseases." *Acta Neuropathol* **130**(6): 891-893.

CTE: Controversy?

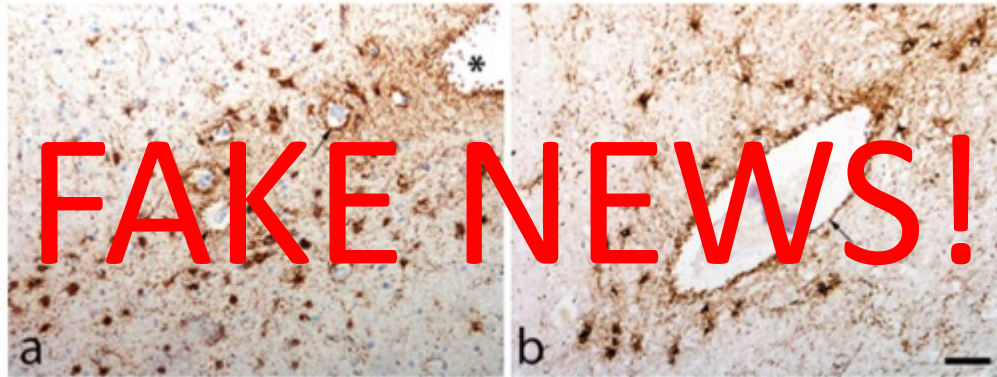
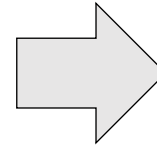


Fig. 1 Characteristic histological features of chronic traumatic encephalopathy (CTE). Abnormal perivascular accumulation of tau-immunoreactive lesions in neurons, astrocytes and neurites in an irregular pattern at the depth of the sulcus in the frontal cor-

tex [arrows pointing to blood vessels, asterisks locating at bottom of sulcus; a, b tau immunohistochemistry (AT8); bar in a 25 μ m, in b 25 μ m]



Aging-related tau astrogliopathy (ARTAG): harmonized evaluation strategy

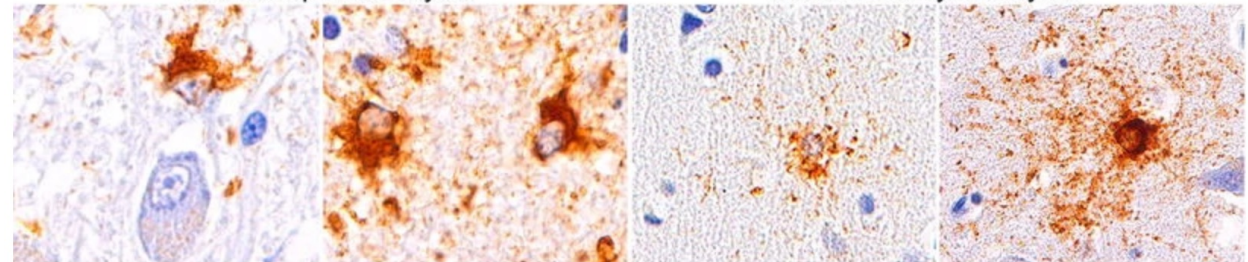
Gabor G. Kovacs¹ · Isidro Ferrer² · Lea T. Grinberg^{3,4} · Irina Alafuzoff⁵ · Johannes Attems⁶ · Herbert Budka⁷ · Nigel J. Cairns⁸ · John F. Crary^{9,33} · Charles Duyckaerts¹⁰ · Bernardino Ghetti¹¹ · Glenda M. Halliday¹² · James W. Ironside¹³ · Seth Love¹⁴ · Ian R. Mackenzie¹⁵ · David G. Munoz¹⁶ · Melissa E. Murray¹⁷ · Peter T. Nelson¹⁸ · Hitoshi Takahashi¹⁹ · John Q. Trojanowski²⁰ · Olaf Ansorge²¹ · Thomas Arzberger²² · Atik Baborie²³ · Thomas G. Beach²⁴ · Kevin F. Bieniek¹⁷ · Eileen H. Bigio²⁵ · Istvan Bodi²⁶ · Brittany N. Dugger^{24,27} · Mel Feany²⁸ · Ellen Gelpi²⁹ · Stephen M. Gentleman³⁰ · Giorgio Giaccone³¹ · Kimmo J. Hatanpaa³² · Richard Heale⁶ · Patrick R. Hof³³ · Monika Hofer²¹ · Tibor Hortobágyi³⁴ · Kurt Jellinger³⁵ · Gregory A. Jicha³⁶ · Paul Ince³⁷ · Julia Kofler³⁸ · Enikő Kövari³⁹ · Jillian J. Kril⁴⁰ · David M. Mann⁴¹ · Radoslav Matej⁴² · Ann C. McKee⁴³ · Catriona McLean⁴⁴ · Ivan Milenkovic^{1,45} · Thomas J. Montine⁴⁶ · Shigeo Murayama⁴⁷ · Edward B. Lee²⁰ · Jasmin Rahimi¹ · Roberta D. Rodriguez⁴⁸ · Annemieke Rozemüller⁴⁹ · Julie A. Schneider^{50,51} · Christian Schultz⁵² · William Seeley³ · Danielle Seilhean¹⁰ · Colin Smith¹³ · Fabrizio Tagliavini³¹ · Masaki Takao⁵³ · Dietmar Rudolf Thal^{54,55} · Jon B. Toledo²⁰ · Markus Tolnay⁵⁶ · Juan C. Troncoso⁵⁷ · Harry V. Vinters^{58,59} · Serge Weis⁶⁰ · Stephen B. Wharton³⁷ · Charles L. White III³² · Thomas Wisniewski^{61,62,63} · John M. Woulfe⁶⁴ · Masahito Yamada⁶⁵ · Dennis W. Dickson¹⁷

13% of normal individuals have CTE pathology?

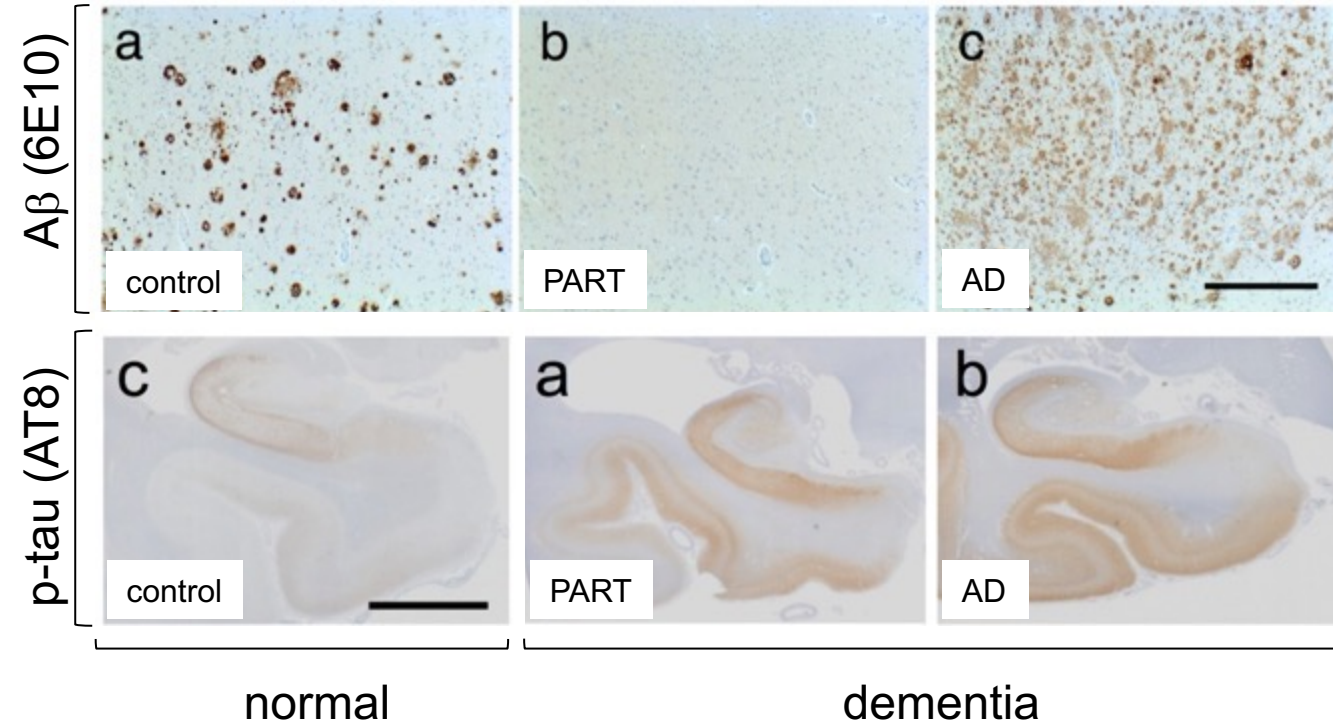
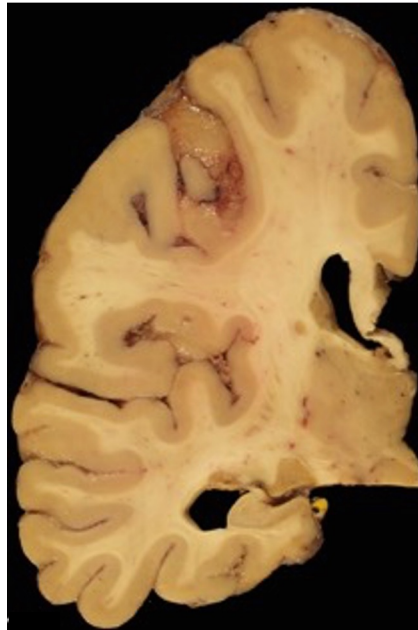
Ling, H., J. L. Holton, K. Shaw, K. Davey, T. Lashley and T. Revesz (2015). "Histological evidence of chronic traumatic encephalopathy in a large series of neurodegenerative diseases." *Acta Neuropathol* **130**(6): 891-893.

Thorn-shaped astrocytes

Granular / fuzzy astrocytes



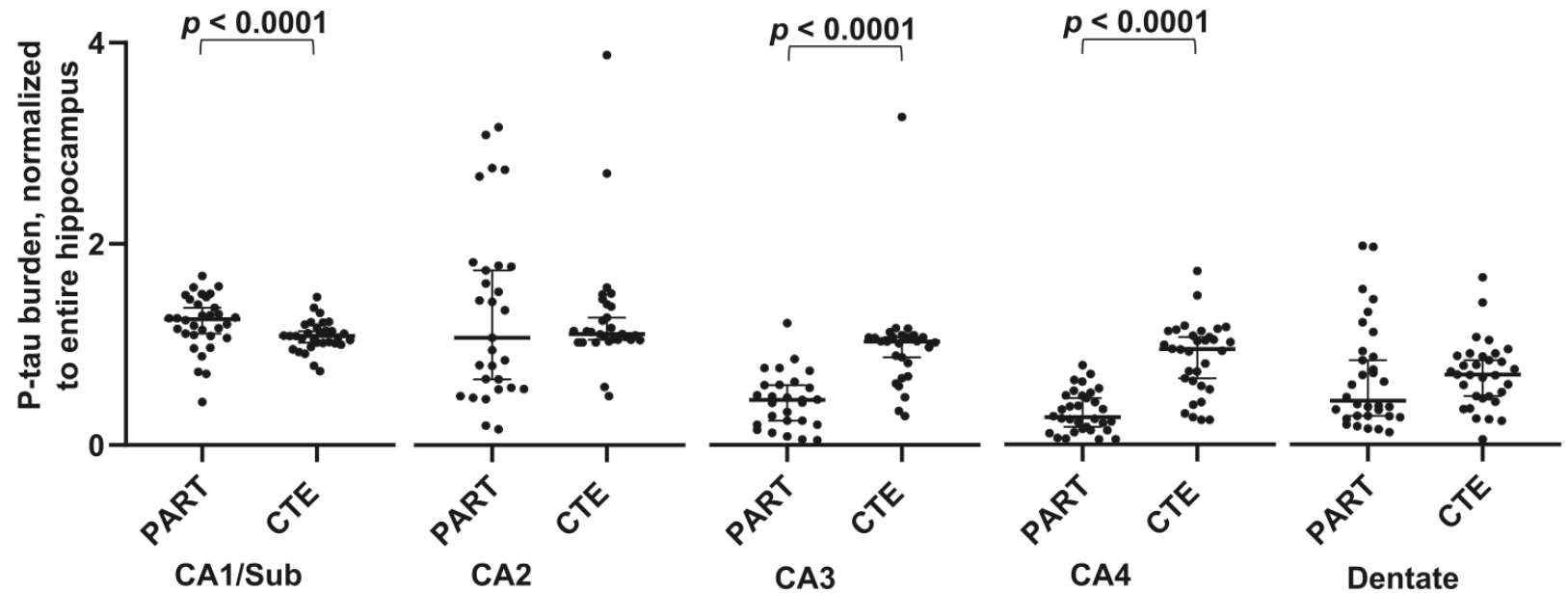
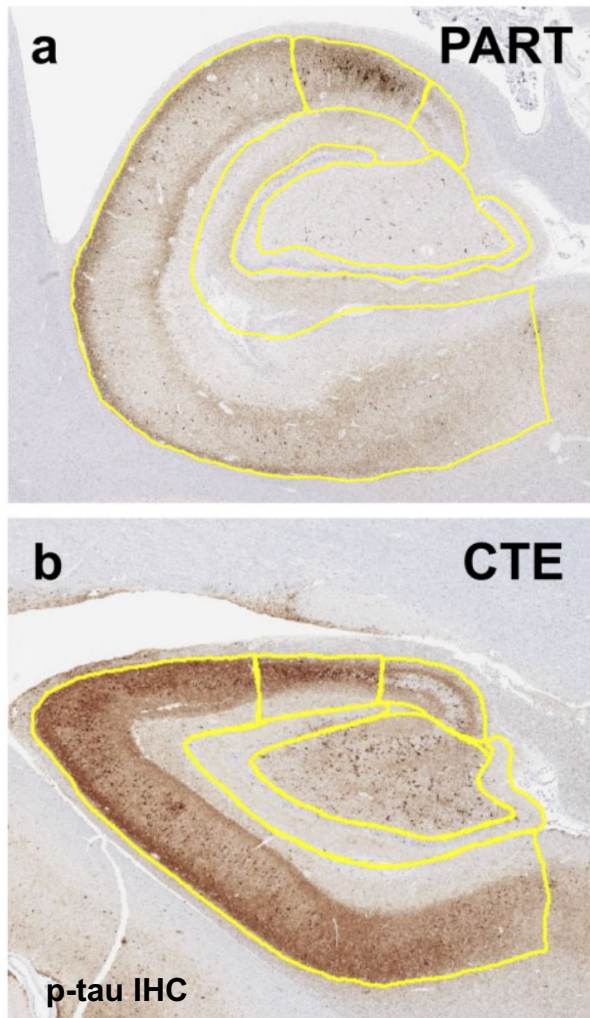
CTE: Controversy?



Primary age-related tauopathy vs. “classical” AD

1. Crary, J. F., J. Q. Trojanowski, J. A. Schneider, J. et al., (2014). "Primary age-related tauopathy (PART): a common pathology associated with human aging." *Acta Neuropathol* 128(6): 755-766.
2. Santa-Maria, I., Haggiagi, A., Liu, X.M., Wasserscheid, J., Nelson, P.T., Dewar, K., Clark, L.N., and Crary, J.F. 2012. The MAPT H1 haplotype is associated with tangle-predominant dementia. *Acta Neuropathologica* 124:693-704

CTE: Selective vulnerability in CTE



Farrell et al. Differential Vulnerability of Hippocampal Subfields in Primary Age-Related Tauopathy and Chronic Traumatic Encephalopathy. J Neuropathol Exp Neurol. 2022 Sep 19;81(10):781-789

Age prediction model

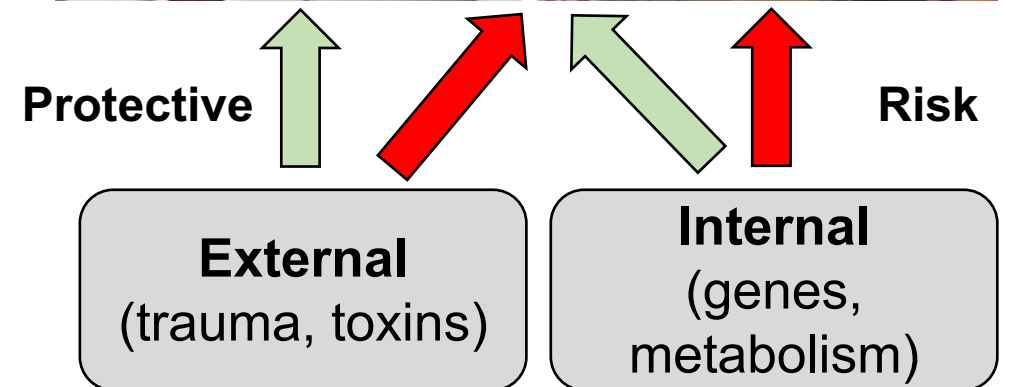
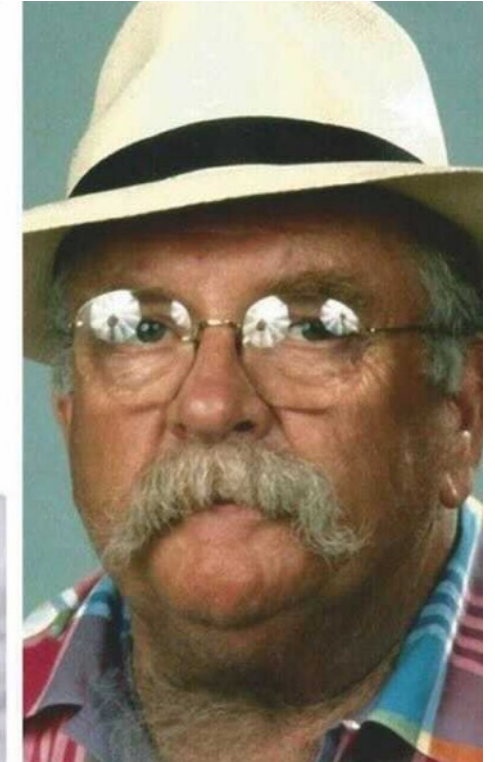


- Discordance between chronological and biological age = age acceleration
- Rates differ by organ, population, species
- Factors can be *protective* or *accelerate* aging
- Aging can be *normal*, *pathologic*, or *successful*

Paul Rudd



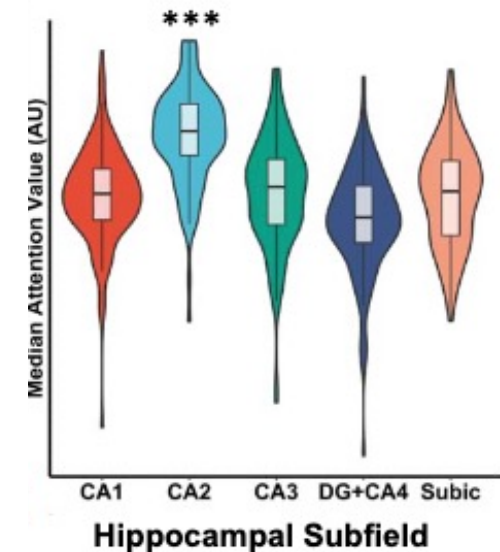
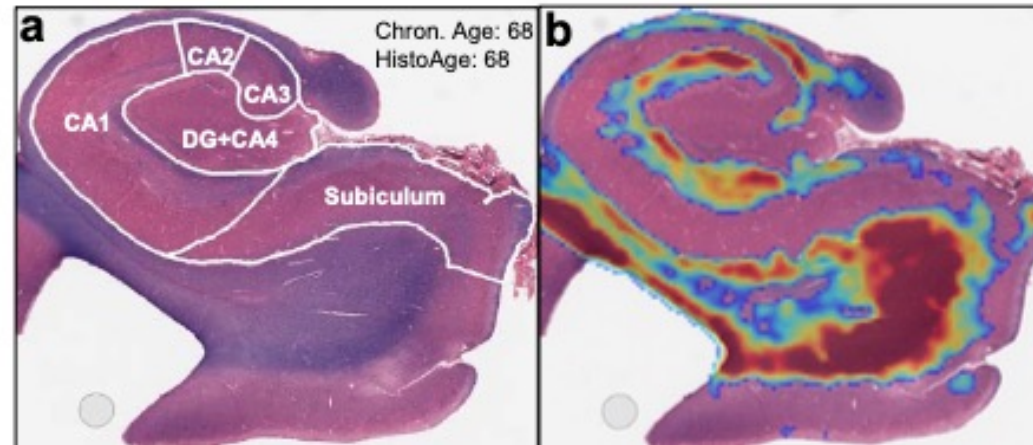
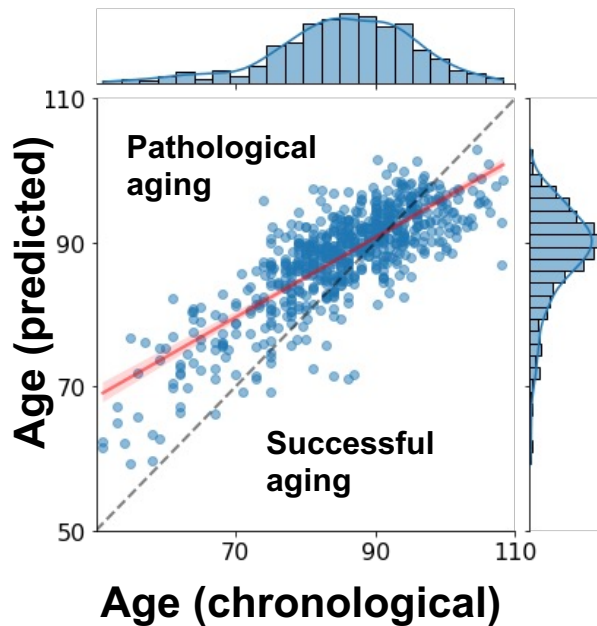
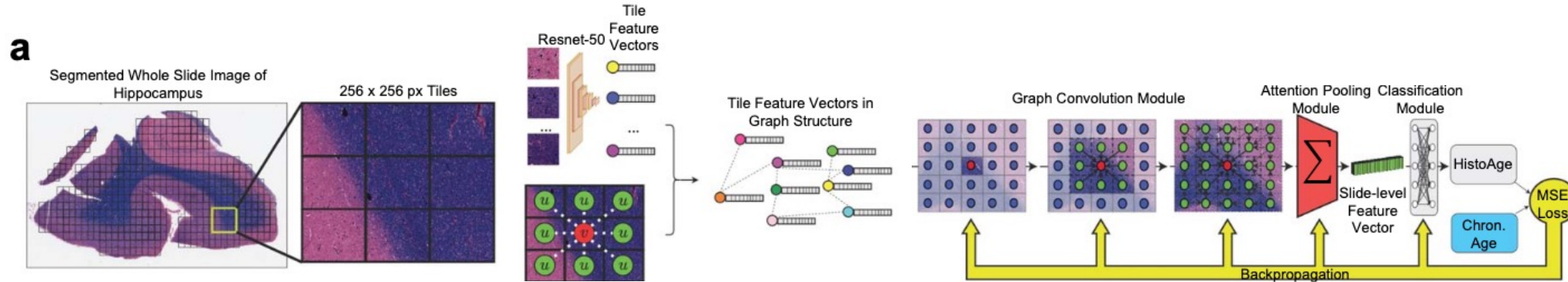
Wilford Brimley



HistoAge brain age-acceleration model



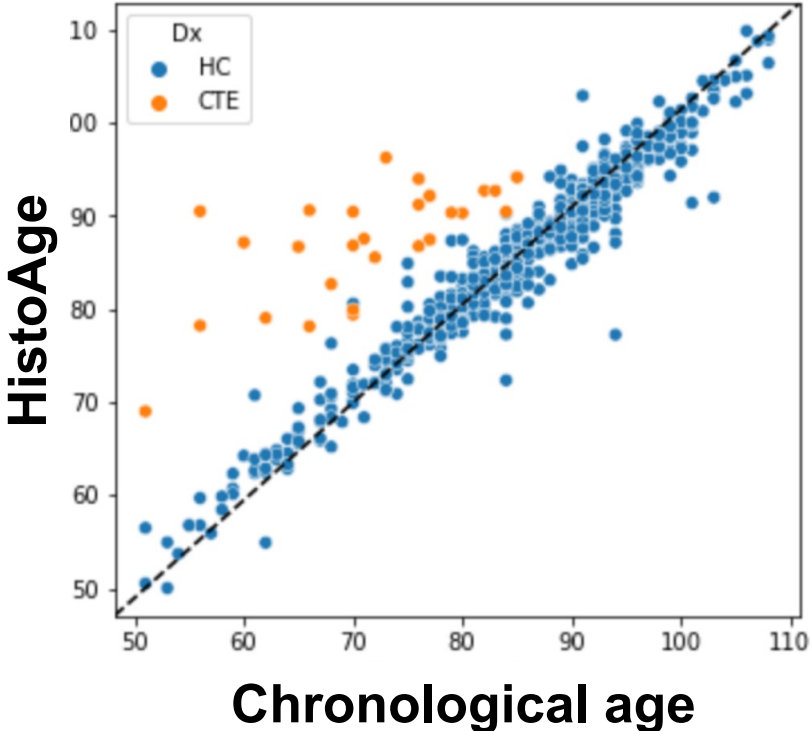
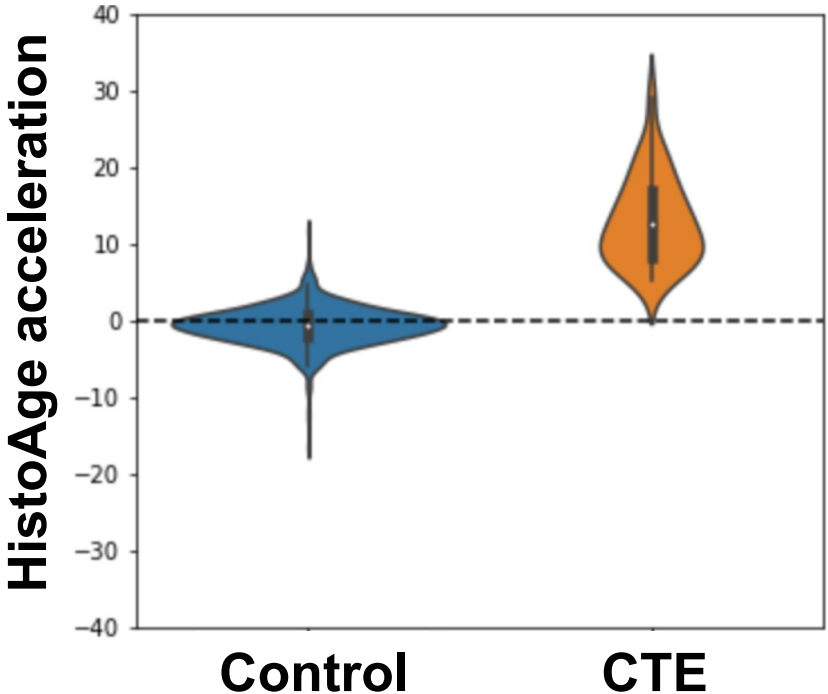
Gabe Marx MD



HistoAge brain age-acceleration in CTE



Gabe Marx MD



CTE: Controversy?

- Mez, J et al (2017). "Clinicopathological Evaluation of Chronic Traumatic Encephalopathy in Players of American Football." JAMA 318(4): 360-370
 - Of 202 deceased players of American football from a brain donation program, CTE was neuropathologically diagnosed in 177 players across all levels of play (87%)
- Bieniek, KF (2015). "Chronic traumatic encephalopathy pathology in a neurodegenerative disorders brain bank." Acta Neuropathol 130(6): 877-889.
 - >1,700 brains, CTE in 21/66 contact sport athletes (32%)
 - 0/165 with CTE in controls without brain trauma or contact sports
 - 0/33 brains with CTE with a single TBI

Level of play	CTE positive	(Percent)
Professional	110 of 111	99%
College football	48 of 53	91%
High school football	3 of 14	21%

Exposure	CTE Present	CTE Absent	Total
Contact Sports	21	45	66
No Contact Sports	0	198	198
Total	21	243	264

Strong evidence linking contact sports to CTE!

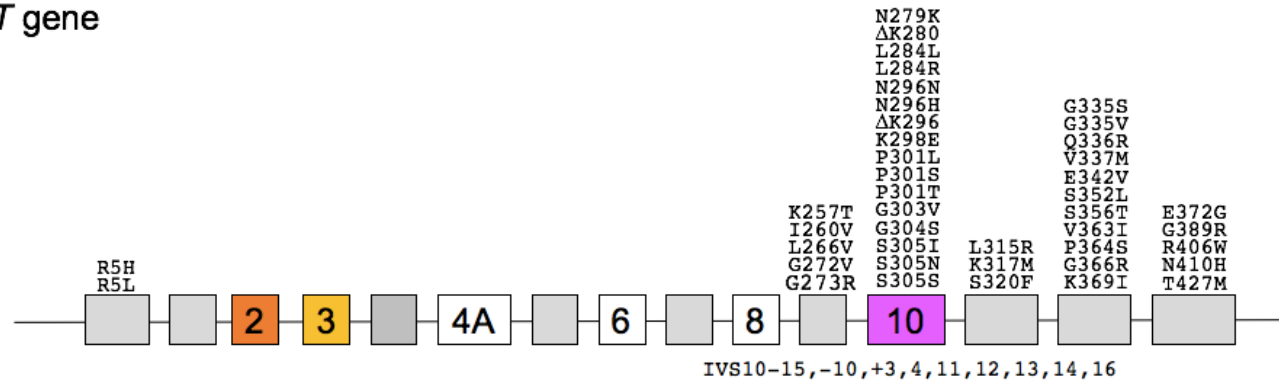
$$p = 1.44 \times 10^{-14}$$

Bradford Hill criteria for causation

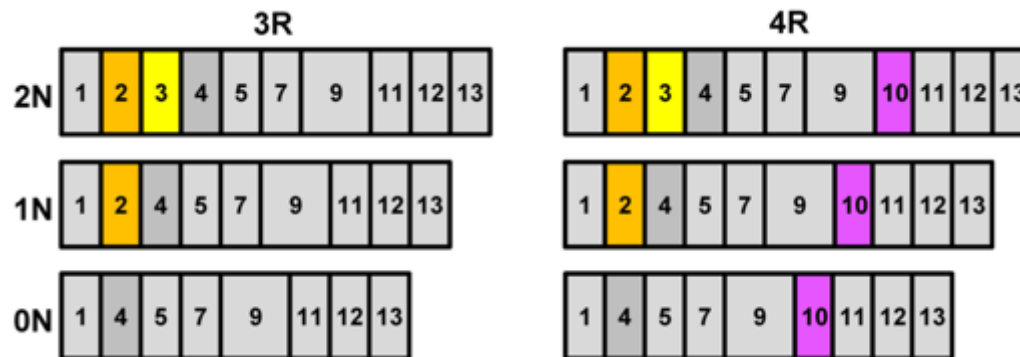
- ✓ **Strength:** The larger the association, the more likely it is causal
- ✓ **Consistency:** Reproducibility in different persons/places/samples strengthens the likelihood of an effect
- ✓ **Specificity:** Causation likely if there is a very specific population and no other likely explanation. The more specific, the more likely
- ✓ **Temporality:** The cause must occur before the effect
- ✓ **Biological gradient:** Greater exposure leads to greater incidence of the effect
- ✓ **Plausibility:** A plausible mechanism between cause and effect is helpful
- ✓ **Coherence:** Coherence between epidemiological and laboratory findings increases the likelihood of an effect
- ✓ **Experiment:** Occasionally it is possible to appeal to experimental evidence
- ✓ **Analogy:** The effect of similar factors may be considered

CTE: tau isoforms

MAPT gene



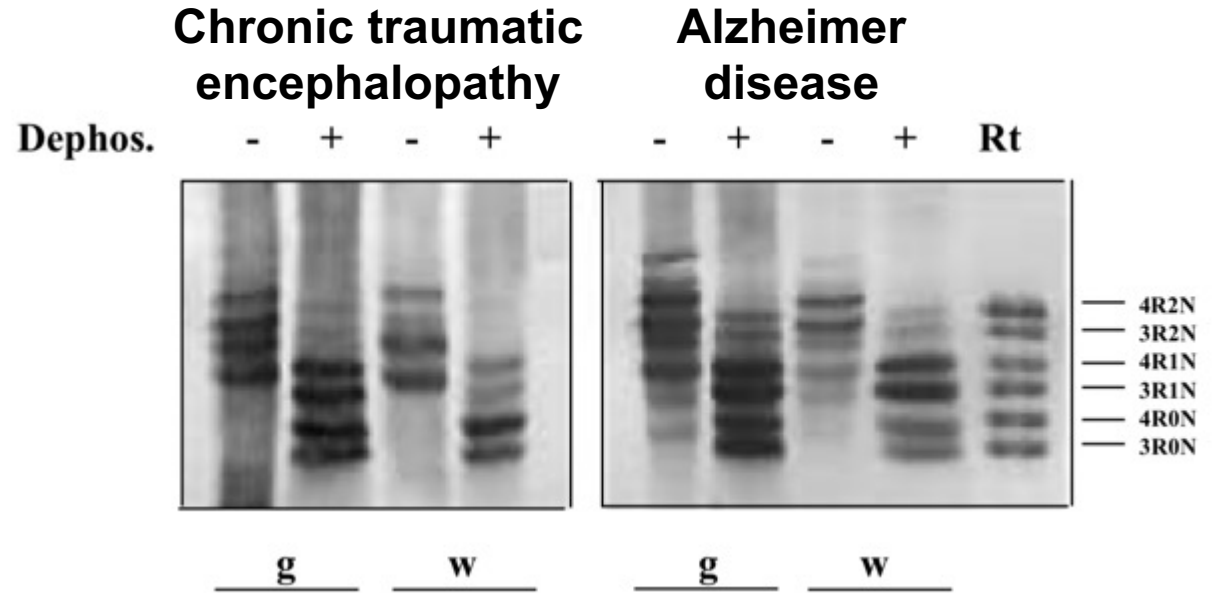
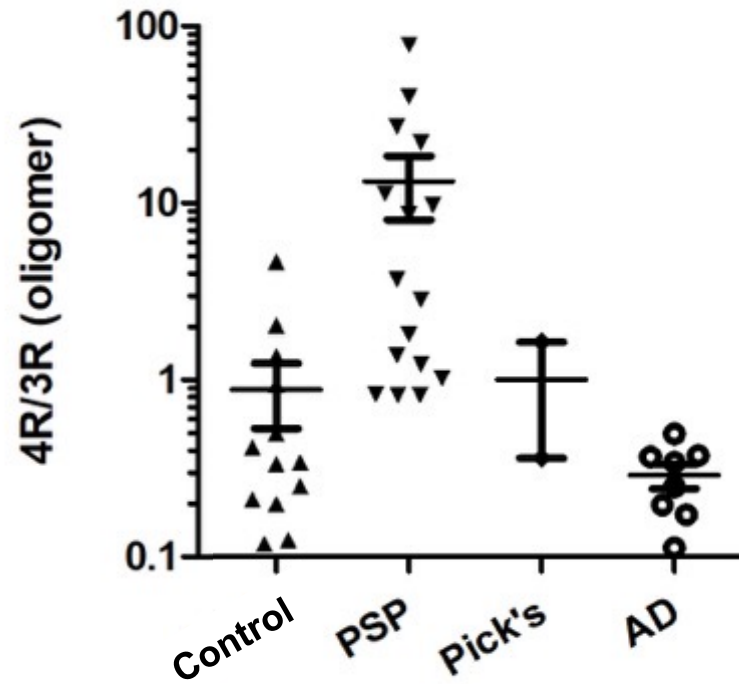
Tau isoforms



- *MAPT* mutation causes frontotemporal lobar degeneration
- Coding region mutations influence microtubule binding and aggregation
- Mutation near exon 10 influence alternative splicing and tau isoform ratio

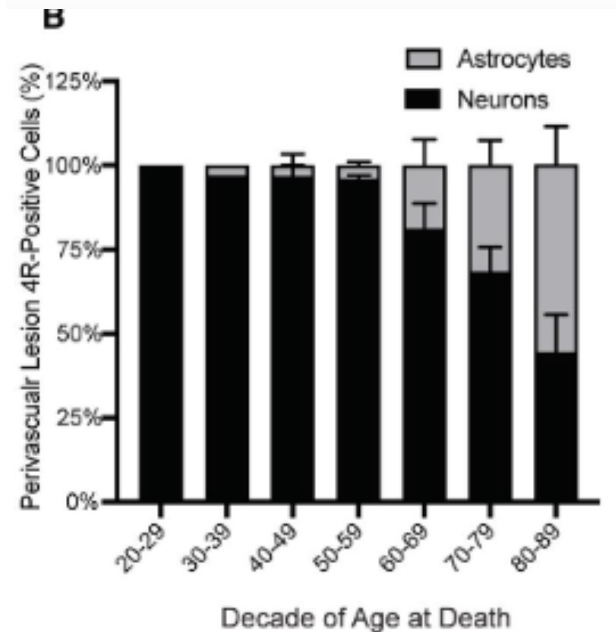
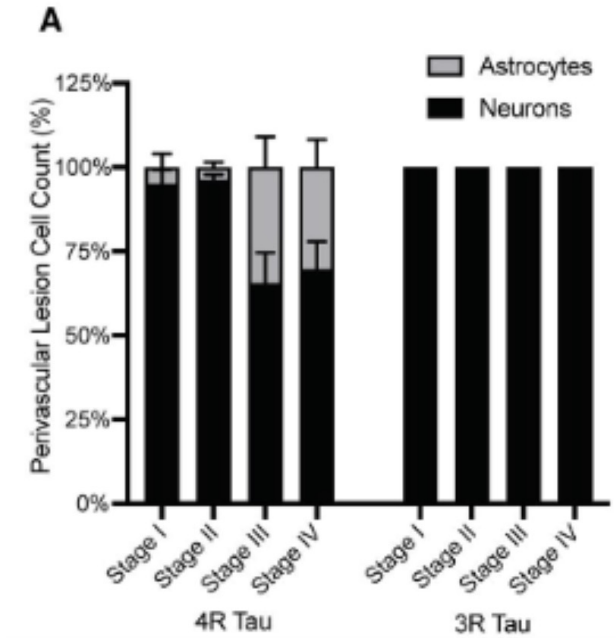
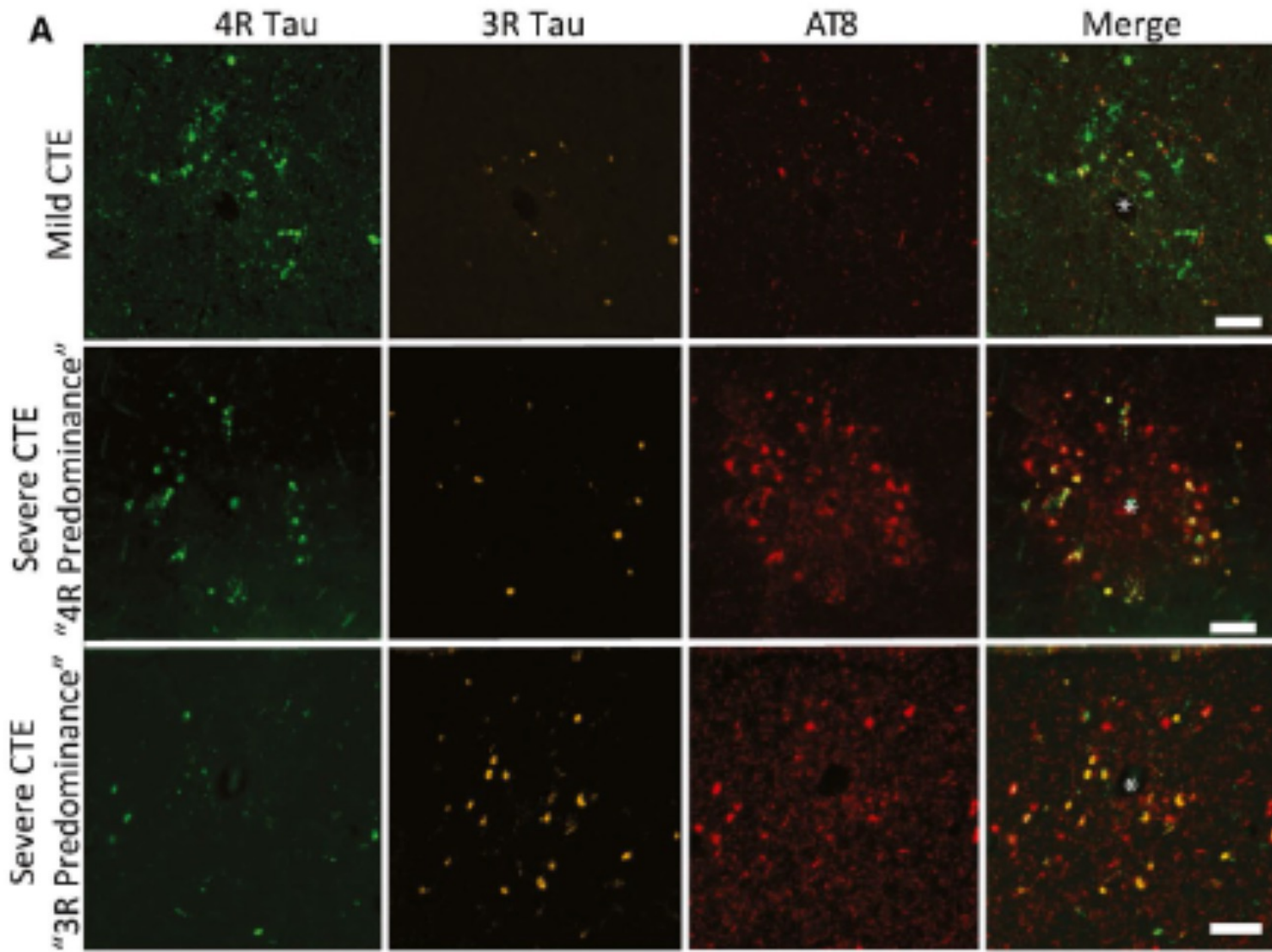
Hutton et al. 1998. Association of missense and 5'-splice-site mutations in tau with the inherited dementia FTDP-17. *Nature* 393:702-705.

CTE: tau isoforms

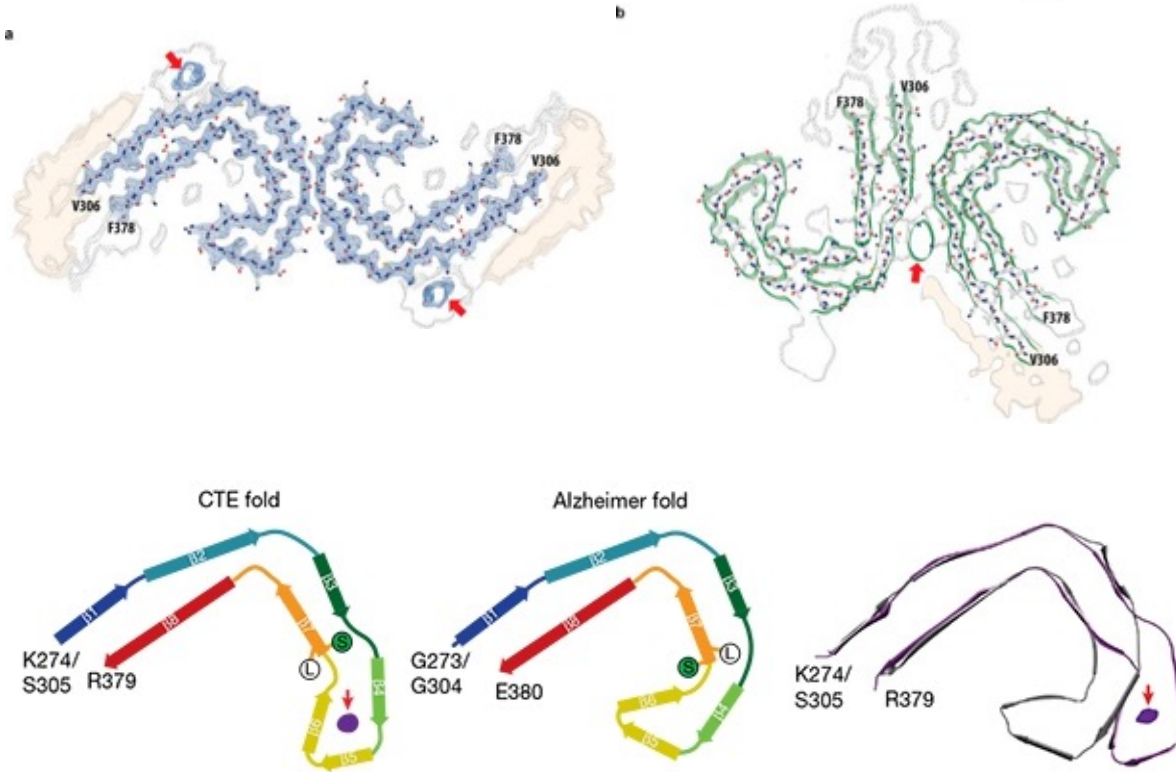


Schmidt, M. L., V. Zhukareva, K. L. Newell, V. M. Lee and J. Q. Trojanowski (2001). "Tau isoform profile and phosphorylation state in dementia pugilistica recapitulate Alzheimer's disease." *Acta Neuropathologica* **101**(5): 518-524.

CTE: tau isoforms



CTE: tau ultrastructure



Fitzpatrick, A. W. P., B. Falcon, S. He, A. G. Murzin, G. Murshudov, H. J. Garringer, R. A. Crowther, B. Ghetti, M. Goedert and S. H. W. Scheres (2017). "Cryo-EM structures of tau filaments from Alzheimer's disease." Nature **547**(7662): 185-190.

Falcon, B., J. Zivanov, W. Zhang, A. G. Murzin, H. J. Garringer, R. Vidal, R. A. Crowther, K. L. Newell, B. Ghetti, M. Goedert and S. H. W. Scheres (2019). "Novel tau filament fold in chronic traumatic encephalopathy encloses hydrophobic molecules." Nature.

THANKS!

