



Sensory Conflict Theory

A psychological explanation of motion sickness
and perceptual mismatch



What is Sensory Conflict Theory

Sensory Conflict Theory explains discomfort or motion sickness as a result of **mismatched sensory information**.

The conflict mainly occurs between:



**Visual
system**

Vestibular system
(inner ear)

**Proprioceptive
system**
(body position)

When these systems provide **inconsistent signals**, the brain struggles to integrate them.

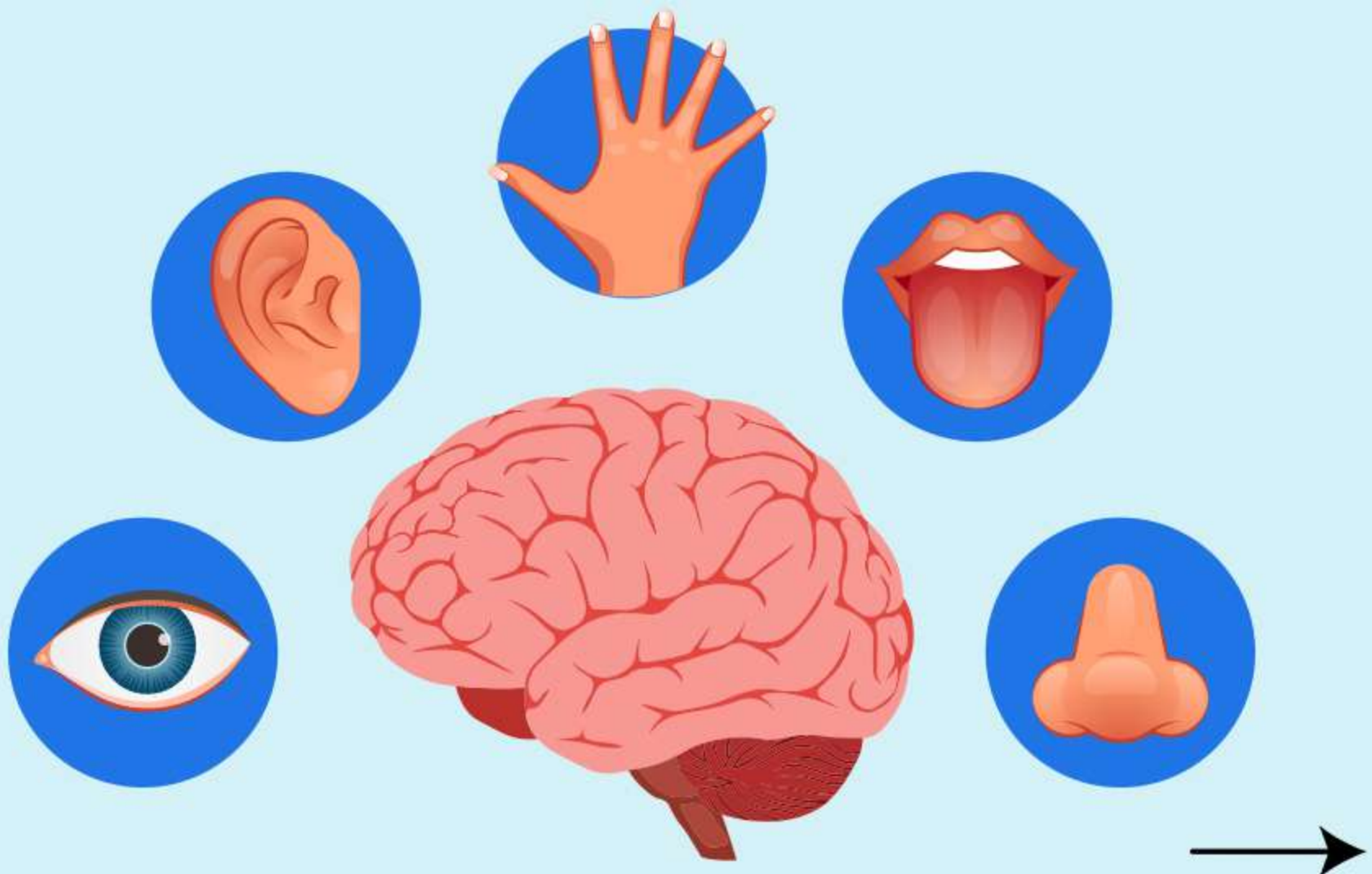


Psychological Basis

From a psychological perspective, perception depends on sensory integration.

- The brain forms an internal model of movement and balance
- Incoming sensory signals are compared with this model
- When signals contradict it, a perceptual mismatch occurs

This mismatch leads to **cognitive confusion and physiological discomfort**.
This aligns with **predictive processing theories** of perception.

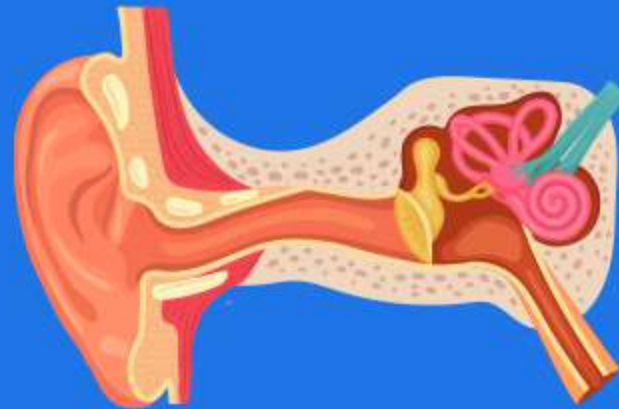


Role of Sensory Systems



Visual system:
Provides information
about motion and
spatial orientation

Vestibular system:
Detects acceleration,
rotation, and balance



Proprioception:
Signals body posture
and body movement

Motion sickness occurs when at least two systems send
contradictory signals to the brain.



Classic Psychology Example

Car or Sea Sickness

When the eyes perceive stillness but the inner ear senses movement, the brain receives conflicting information.

This sensory mismatch leads to symptoms such as:



This is a commonly cited example in psychology.

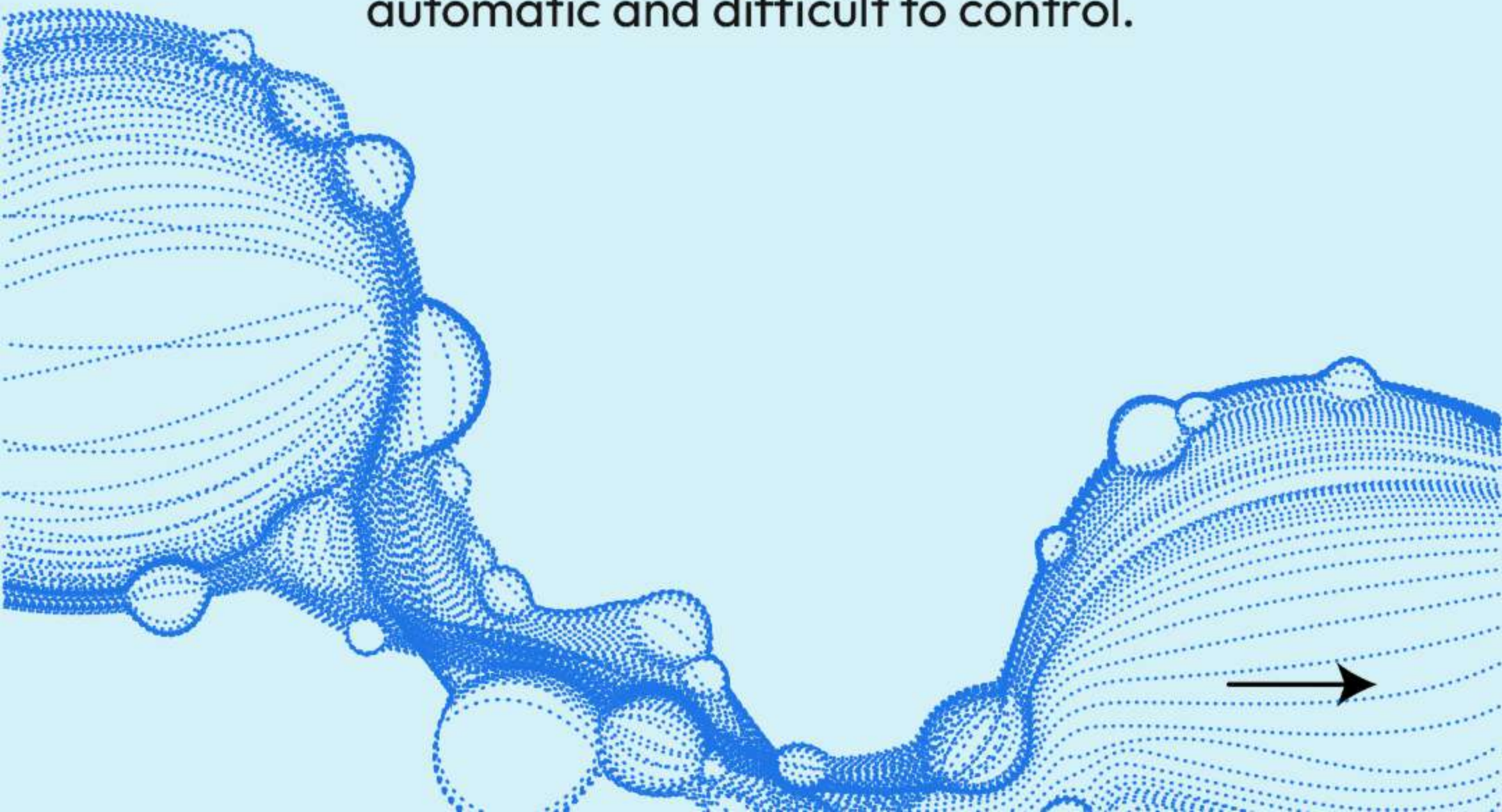


Evolutionary Explanation

Psychologists suggest that sensory conflict may be interpreted by the brain as neurotoxin ingestion.

- Sensory confusion resembles the effects of poisoning
- The brain activates protective responses like nausea and vomiting

This explains why motion sickness responses are automatic and difficult to control.

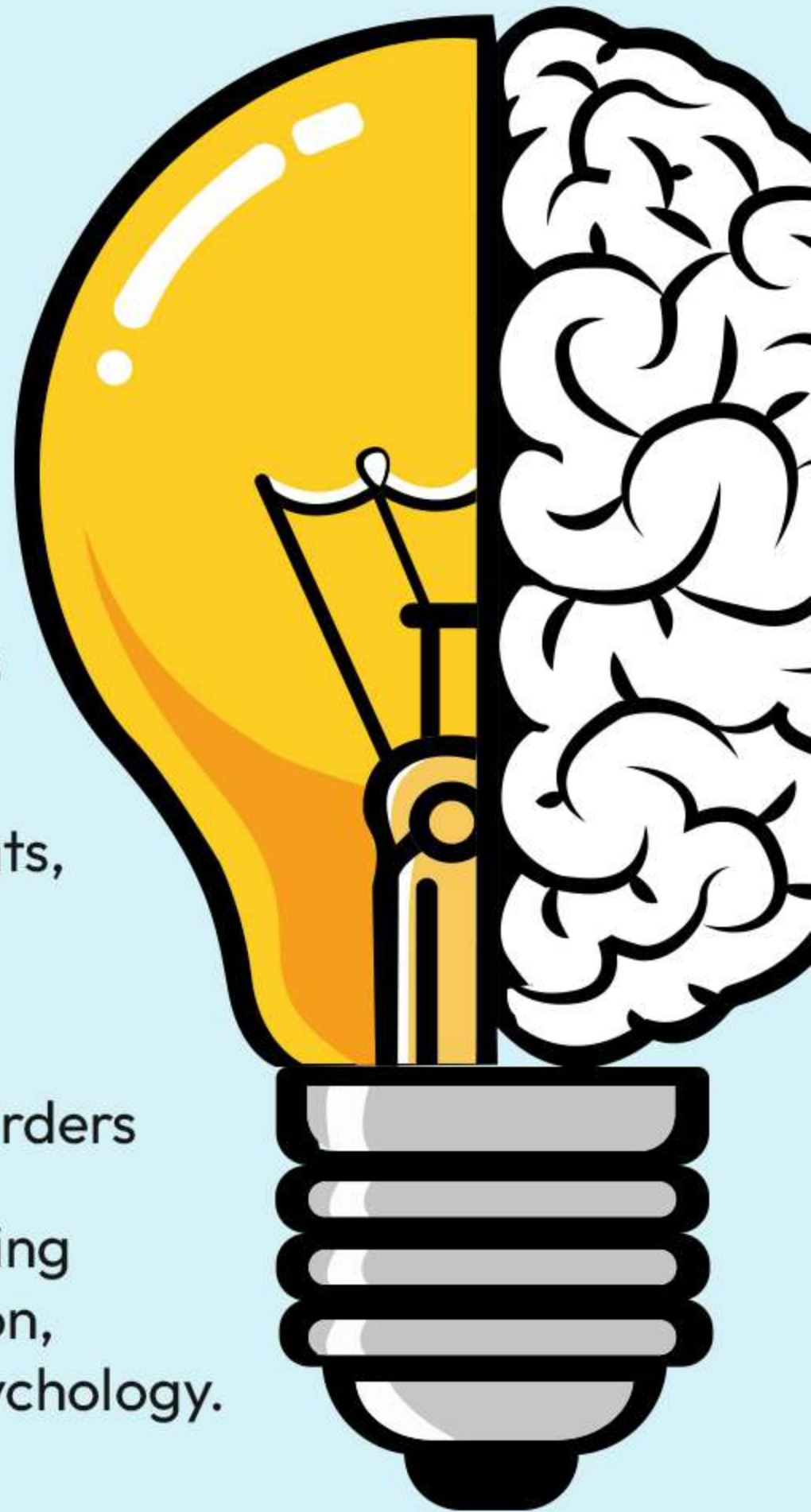


Applications and Importance

Sensory Conflict Theory helps explain:

- Motion sickness in cars, boats, and airplanes
- VR and simulator sickness
- Balance and vestibular disorders

It is important for understanding perception, sensory integration, and adaptive behaviour in psychology.



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