Your notes

GCSE Psychology: revision notes

Early brain development

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How the brain develops

- The brain develops rapidly before birth and in early childhood.
- The **brain stem** develops first: it controls automatic functions such as breathing, heart rate and sleep.
- The **thalamus** relays sensory information; the **cerebellum** controls balance and coordination; the **cortex**, which develops more slowly, is responsible for thinking, language and planning.

Nature and nurture

- **Nature**: the role of genes. Genes set out the basic structure of the brain and influence abilities.
- **Nurture**: the role of the environment. Experiences, stimulation, nutrition and relationships shape how the brain develops.
- Most psychologists agree development results from an interaction of **nature** and **nurture**.

Why early experience matters

- A stimulating environment with play, talk and care supports brain development.
- Neglect or poor nutrition in early childhood can harm development.

Key terms

Brain stem	The part of the brain controlling automatic functions such as breathing.
Thalamus	The part of the brain that relays sensory information.
Cerebellum	The part of the brain controlling balance and coordination.
Cortex	The outer layer of the brain, responsible for thinking and planning.

Nature	The influence of genes on development.
Nurture	The influence of the environment on development.

Quick questions

Cover the answers and test yourself: remembering is what makes it stick.

1. Which part of the brain develops first?
2. What does the cerebellum control?
3. What does the thalamus do?
4. What is nature in the nature and nurture debate?
5. What is nurture?
6. Which part of the brain is responsible for thinking and planning?
7. What do most psychologists say about nature and nurture?
8. What can harm early brain development?

Answers

1. The brain stem
2. Balance and coordination
3. Relays sensory information
4. The influence of genes
5. The influence of the environment
6. The cortex
7. Development results from an interaction of both
8. Neglect or poor nutrition

What to do next

Practise 10 questions on this topic

Try 4 exam questions, with mark schemes

Read the lesson, one step at a time

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