

Neurotransmitters 101

A guide to the brain's chemical messengers, and how regulating them enables us to treat numerous disorders

TO CONTROL THOUGHT AND MOVEMENT AND PROCESS SENSORY INPUT, THE BRAIN SENDS and receives electrical impulses via the vast network of neurons in the human nervous system. Because these impulses can't cross gaps between the neurons, called synapses, the neurons release neurotransmitters, chemical agents that can be read by special receptors on the receiving neurons. Dozens of neurotransmitters have been discovered since the first one was identified in 1921, and hundreds more may exist. The six described below are the best-understood and have provided the most insight into how certain neurological diseases work, and how we can treat them. —MARC BAIN

