

What your neural stem cells aren't telling you

In 2000, a team of neuroscientists put an unusual idea to the test. Stress and depression, they knew, made neurons wither and die – particularly in the hippocampus, a brain area crucial for memory. So the researchers put some stressed-out rats on an antidepressant regimen, hoping the mood boost might protect some of those hippocampal neurons. When they checked in a few weeks later, though, the team found that rats' hippocampuses hadn't just survived intact; they'd grown whole new neurons – [bundles of them](#). But that's only the beginning of our tale.

By the time 2009 rolled around, another team of researchers was [suggesting](#) that human brains might get a similar hippocampal boost from antidepressants. The press announced the discovery with headlines like, "[Antidepressants Grow New Brain Cells](#)" – although [not everyone agreed](#) with that conclusion. Still, whether the principle applied to humans or not, a far more basic question was begging to be answered: *How*, exactly, does a brain tell new cells to form?

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