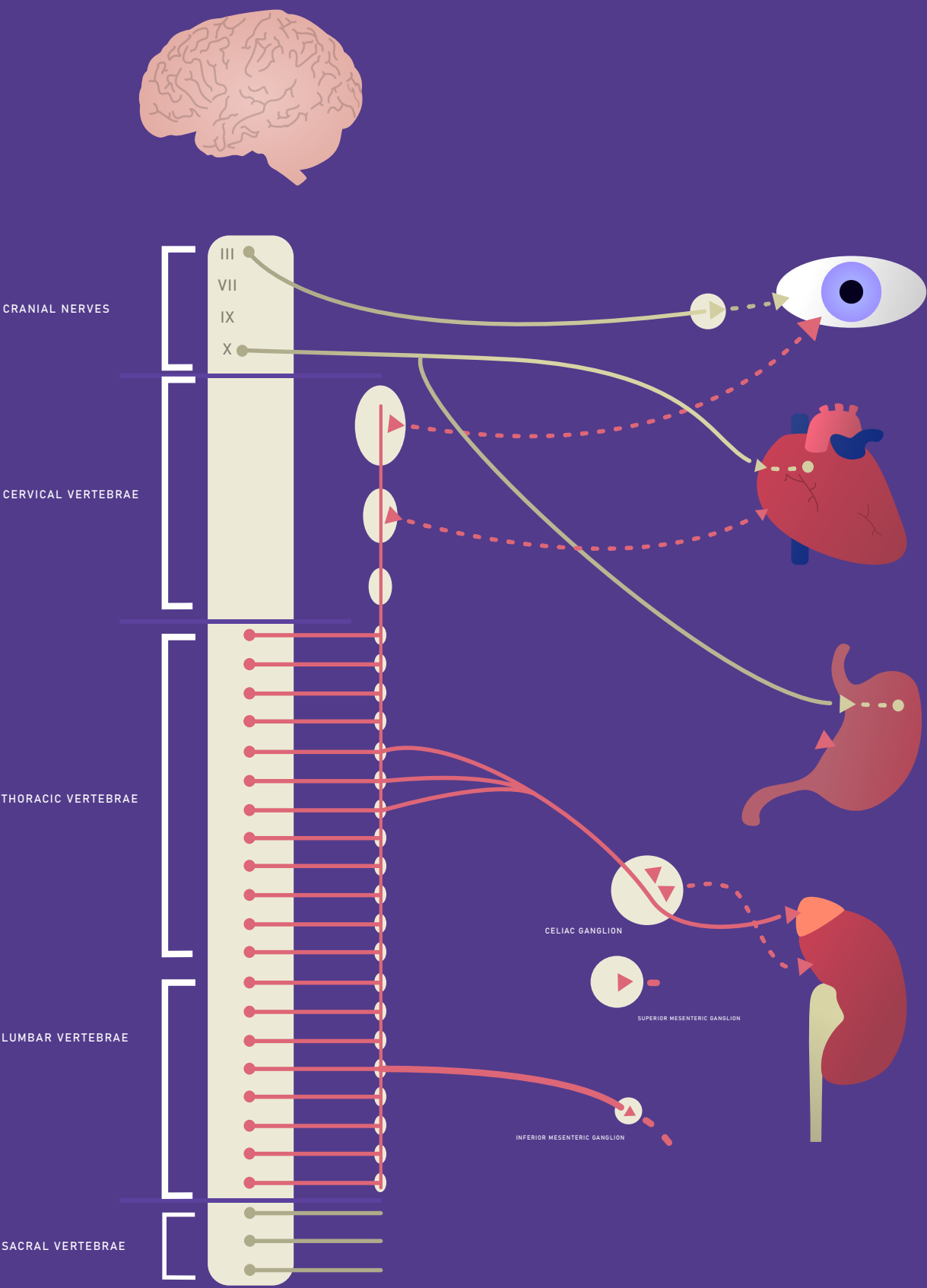


# THE AUTONOMIC NERVOUS SYSTEM



The autonomic nervous system enables the body to perform certain functions without the need for conscious input. This system originates from the central nervous system and is split into two divisions: the parasympathetic and the sympathetic. They are also called the craniosacral division and the thoracolumbar division as a result of their respective origins along the spinal cord.

This diagram presents an overview of the system's general structure. The preganglionic neurons of the parasympathetic division originate from the cranial nerves and sacral region of the spinal cord. They synapse with postganglionic neurons at ganglia very close to or even inside target organs. The preganglionic neurons of the sympathetic division originate from the thoracic and lumbar regions of the spinal cord, generally synapsing with post ganglionic neurons at the sympathetic chain ganglia located close to the spinal cord. Exceptions include the celiac ganglion, superior mesenteric ganglion, and inferior mesenteric ganglion, which are located closer to target organs (similar to the parasympathetic division).

A more specific exception is the adrenal gland. The adrenal gland does not receive input from post ganglionic neurons. It is instead directly targeted by neurons that originate from the spinal cord that pass through the superior mesenteric ganglion before reaching the gland.

