

Understanding The Senses

Interoception: Sensing Inside our Body



Interoception is the sensory system that allows us to sense, notice and understand what is happening inside our body.

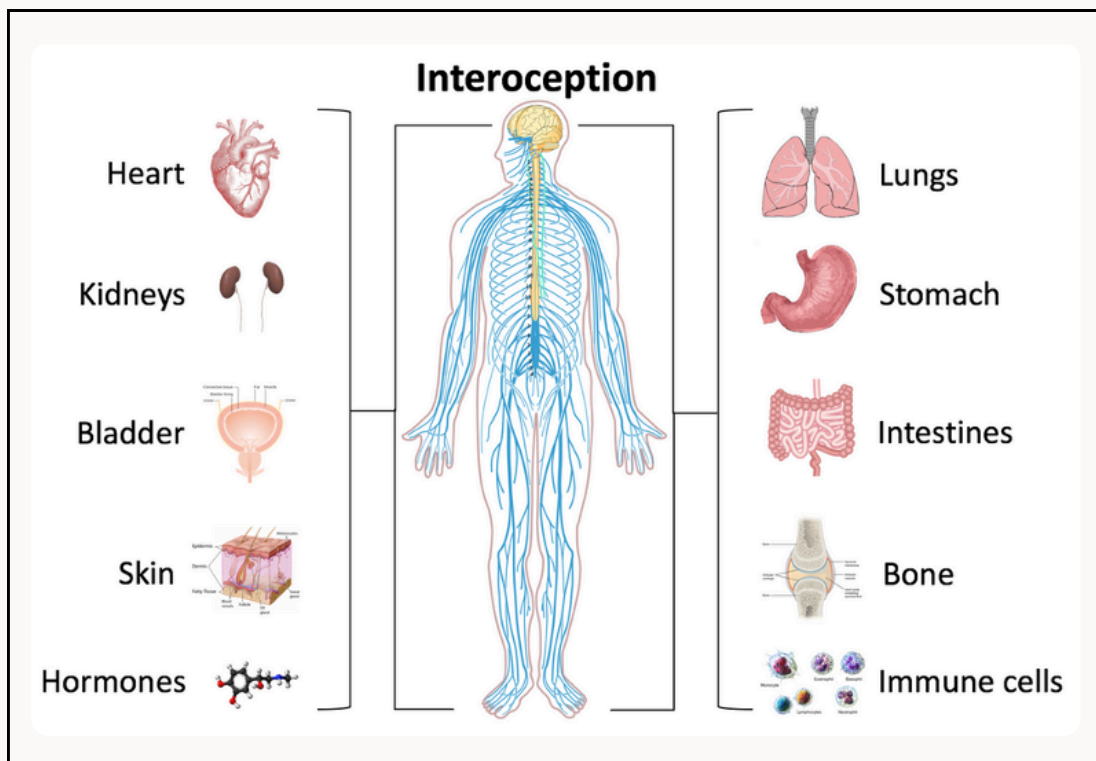
OVERVIEW

Interoception

Receptors are located in internal organs and major blood vessels, constantly sending signals to the brain about our internal state.

Information includes:

- Hunger, thirst, fullness
- Bladder and Bowel
- Breath rate, heart rate, temperature regulation and other automatic functions
- Energy, fatigue, illness, tiredness
- Physical sensations that accompany emotions, tight chest, pounding heart, change in heart rate, butterflies, dry throat.



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Interoception Supports Regulation, Emotion and Social Skills

The ability to notice body signals and connect them to a feeling, including emotion is part of interoceptive awareness.

It has two key components:

- Notice: What body signals do I feel on the inside of my body?
- Connect: What do these body signals mean? What emotion am I experiencing?

Once we notice and connect, we're then able to take an action that restores comfort or balance within the body.

For example, noticing a growling stomach, connecting that to a signal of hunger, then eating. Or noticing a butterflies in stomach and racing heart, connecting that to experience of worry or nervousness, then going to parent or carer for comfort.

This Notice, Connect, Regulate cycle is the foundation of independent self-regulation.

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Common Signs of Differences with Interoception

Differences in interoceptive awareness can present in a range of ways, including some of the following:

- May experience intense feelings of hunger, thirst, or bladder urgency that seem to arrive quickly and intensely
- Emotions seem to escalate suddenly, without a gradual build-up, 0-100
- Appears not to notice internal signals of hunger thirst, change clothing when hot / cold so they may forget to eat or drink for long periods
- Appears unaware or overly aware of pain, injury, tired, sick
- May not realise they are becoming upset until already in a state of distress
- Knows something feels uncomfortable or 'not right' but cannot identify what
- Knows they feel an emotion but has difficulty naming the specific emotion

These signs can look like behaviour, defiance, emotional dysregulation, inattention, 'laziness' but may stem from differences in interoception.

If you think your child may have differences with interoceptive awareness, contact your local Occupational Therapist to discuss the process of assessment and intervention.

OVERVIEW

Ways to Support Interoceptive Awareness

The most powerful way to build interoceptive awareness is through consistent, warm, curious conversations about what is happening inside the body.

- Naming and Noticing: Help your child connect body sensations to needs
- Share your own internal experience aloud, ‘my mouth feels dry, I think I’m thirsty.’
- Naming your child’s body signals as you notice them, ‘I can see your body looks red, I wonder if you’re feeling warm / hot?’
- Allow them to identify the solution, rather than telling them what to do, ‘What might your body be telling you?’ ‘Take off my jumper’.
- Build a large bank of words that describe internal sensations, my body feels revved up, floppy, tired, wobbly, fizzy



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