

Autism Hub

West Cheshire



Interoception

What it is, how it is relevant to autism and what to do about it.

Interoception: What is it?



- [Interoception: The New Topic in Autism - YouTube](#)

Interoception

What is INTEROCEPTION?

Interoception is a sense that allows us to notice internal body signals like a growling stomach, racing heart, tense muscles or full bladder. When we notice these body signals our brain uses them as clues to our emotions.

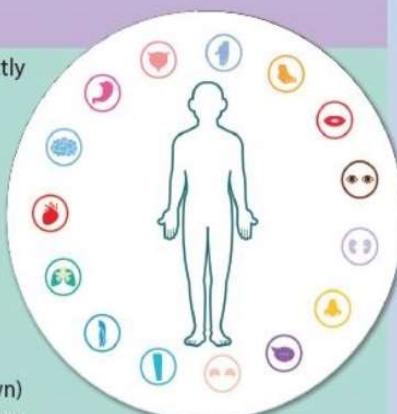
Interoception helps us to feel many important emotions including:

Hunger	Pain	Sleepiness	Anxiety	Calm
Fullness	Illness	Need for Bathroom	Distraction	Boredom
Thirst	Body Temperature	Anger	Focus	Sadness

Differences in Interoception

are very common and can lead to challenges in identifying exactly how one feels. Common signs of interoception differences can include **difficulty** with one or more of the following:

- Recognizing when hungry, full or thirsty
- Toilet training (daytime and/or night time)
- Identifying when sleepy
- Overly sensitive or not sensitive enough to pain
- Pinpointing symptoms of illness
- Identifying emotions in self
- Identifying emotions in others
- Recognizing building signs of distress (before a full meltdown)
- Independently using coping strategies during times of distress



This relates to sensitivity/awareness of our organs inside our body, recognising internal body signals. These signals let you know when you need to eat or drink, go to the toilet, when you are in pain etc.

[Https://kellymahler.com](https://kellymahler.com)

Our body's petrol tank:

Mahler (2017) describes interoception as being like our body's petrol tank.

Signals in our body's petrol tank



Our body reacts in the necessary way.

Compare difficulties with interoception with petrol tank not working in a car?



Interoception facts:



“Interoception allows us to feel our internal organs and skin and gives information regarding the internal state or condition of our body”
(Craig, 2002 cited in Mahler, 2017).

- The control centre for interoception is the insula area in the brain.
- Interoception is connected to being able to regulate emotions...we use the signals from our body to know how we feel.
- If we don't recognize the signals in our body then we often rely on learning the rules, working everything out instead of using instinct.

Activities to promote interoceptive awareness:

Regularly check in with your body, asking yourself questions about the various parts of your body. For example, How fast is my heart?

My eyes feel heavy because I am tired.

Body scan (Mahler, 2017).

Interoception Recognising signals in our body: body check



Hearing:

How do you feel in the shower, in a quiet/loud room, listening to music, headphones



Brain:

How does your brain feel when you are in a crowded place, reading a book, watching t.v?

Eyes:

How do your eyes feel in sunlight, dark, when tired?

Nose

What can you smell when cooking, how do you feel when breathing in cold air, when you have a blocked nose?

Heart and lungs

How do you feel when you exercise? How does your heart feel when you are surprised, climbing steps etc?

Skin

How do you feel in the freezer aisle of the supermarket or in the sun



Mouth

How does it feel when drinking hot and cold drinks, humming, brushing teeth?

Hands: How do they feel when clapping, in cold/hot weather, washing hands, hand cream?

Stomach and bladder

How does your stomach feel before/after a meal, going over bumps in the car? Bladder: just after having a big drink, when bladder full?

Feet: How does it feel when walking on different surfaces, bath/shower, putting feet up, foot cream.

The benefits of developing interoceptive awareness



As our interoceptive awareness increases we start to become aware of emotions **Before** they are too overwhelming.



We can take steps to regulate how we feel.





Mindfulness

- “paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and non judgementally.”(Kabat-Zinn, 1994, p. 4).
- Taking part in mindfulness meditation is reported to be associated with improvement in the functioning of the insula (Farb et al., 2207).