

What is Interoception?

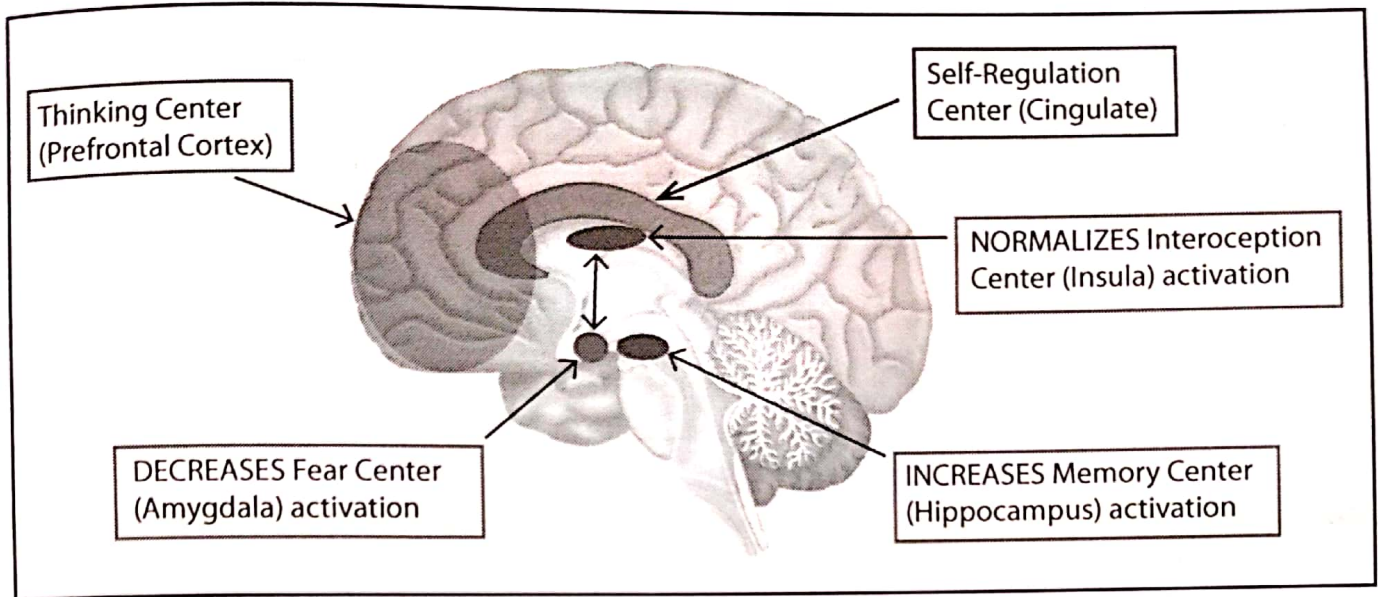
Did you ever notice your heart beating faster? Or, maybe you've noticed that your face suddenly feels hot?

This ability to "feel inside" of yourself and to be aware of internal states is called interoception. When you improve your interoceptive abilities, you can feel into your body and be more aware of how you feel, both physically and emotionally! Interoception can include things like detecting hunger or pain, but it also includes awareness of internal states that tell us which emotions we are feeling.

With strong interoceptive abilities, we can detect and monitor internal states and sensations, which in turn alert us to early signs of emotions, since all emotions are experienced in the body (as well as in the mind).

When we can feel into our bodies and become aware of how we are feeling, even at subtle levels, we are then better able to manage those emotions by intervening early! Interoceptive exposure exercises help us build the ability to notice internal states, and use that information to regulate emotions before they become overwhelming.

Your Brain on Interoceptive Exposure



Interoceptive Exposure techniques change the brain in **five** ways:

1. Less activation in the fear center (amygdala) of the brain:

- Reduces how strongly you react to trauma triggers
- Reduces the stress response and increases the relaxation response
- Decreases hypervigilance and the feeling of "always being on guard"

2. More regulated activation of the interoception center (insula) of the brain:

- Reduces how strongly you react to trauma triggers
- Reduces anger and other emotional outbursts
- Reduces dissociation
- Reduces numbing

3. More activation of the memory center (hippocampus) of the brain:

- Increases feeling of safety
- Reduces fear, especially when faced with trauma triggers
- Increases ability to cope with negative memories

4. Stronger connection from self-regulation (cingulate) and thinking (prefrontal cortex) centers to fear center (amygdala):

- Reduces how strongly you react to trauma triggers
- Increases ability to regulate negative emotions
- Increases ability to de-activate the fear center of the brain

5. Weaker connection from fear center (amygdala) to interoception center (insula):

- Decreases feelings of fear
- Decreases the feeling of chronic anxiety or being on guard