Mitochondrial Mindfulness Practice: A practice based on the feelings of knowing (FoK) - fundamental interoceptive patterns (FIP) theory

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Introduction

How Different Body Regions Relate to Our Feelings

Scientists are beginning to understand that our feelings may not just come from the brain—they also arise from signals inside our body, a process called *interoception*. Three main regions seem especially important: the **heart**, the **head**, and the **abdominopelvic area** (including the stomach, other abdominal organs, and the pelvic floor/genitalia). Each region has its own pattern of nerve activity and energy use that may connect to distinct "feeling tones," or characteristic ways our body and mind experience internal states.

- The **heart region** links to stress, alertness, and energetic drive (*FoK-FIP 1*). The heart doesn't just pump blood—it's closely linked with our body's stress and alertness system (the sympathetic nervous system) and with sensors that detect blood pressure changes. This area's activity may be tied to what's called *FoK-FIP Feeling Tone 1*, which reflects how the body manages and senses energy at the mitochondrial level. In simple terms, this "feeling tone" might capture how we experience energetic drive or internal activation.

- The **head region** connects to mental focus and energy balance in the brain (*FoK-FIP 2*). The brain and its blood vessels require careful regulation of oxygen and glucose. Because mitochondria are central to producing energy for the brain, this area's signals may underlie *FoK-FIP Feeling Tone 2*. People might experience this as a more mental or cognitive kind of feeling—related to focus, clarity, or pressure in the head when energy demand changes.

- The **abdominopelvic region** relates to gut sensations and overall metabolic tone (*FoK-FIP 3*).The gut and lower body contain many sensory nerves that constantly report on digestion, immune activity, and overall metabolic state. This internal "conversation" between organs and mitochondria may correspond to *FoK-FIP Feeling Tone 3*. It could relate to sensations like gut tension, heaviness, or a general sense of being "off" when energy or immune balance is disrupted.

Together, they form a map showing how mitochondrial activity may shape our internal experience—how we *feel from the inside out*.

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Interoception, Mitochondrial States, and ATP Synthase

Interoception refers to the perception of internal bodily states — including subtle feelings of energy, warmth, arousal, tension, or calm. These sensations ultimately depend on **cellular metabolism**, since every tissue's activity and internal "tone" reflects mitochondrial output.

- **Mitochondria** regulate ATP production, reactive oxygen species (ROS), and calcium flux — all of which influence local tissue energy states and neuronal excitability.
- Different mitochondrial compartments (inner membrane, inner membrane space, outer membrane) have distinct **electrochemical and signaling roles**. Variations in these could, in theory, create distinct **molecular "feelings"** that, when integrated by interoceptive circuits, manifest as different *tones* of internal experience (FoK-FIP Feeling tone 1–3).

- Cells need energy to function. That energy comes in the form of molecules called ATP (adenosine triphosphate), which are like rechargeable batteries. **ATP synthase** is the machine that "charges" these batteries. It sits in the mitochondrial inner membrane. Here's how it works:

- **The setup:** Your mitochondria pump hydrogen ions (protons) to one side of a membrane, creating a buildup - like water behind a dam.

- **The turbine:** ATP synthase has a part that literally spins when those protons flow back through it, like water rushing through a dam's turbine. This spinning is real and measurable - about 100 rotations per second!

- **The product:** As it spins, the mechanical motion physically pushes together ADP (a depleted battery) and phosphate to create ATP (a charged battery).

- So basically, your cells convert the energy from food into a proton gradient, use that gradient to spin a molecular turbine, and that spinning motion manufactures the ATP that powers everything you do. It's one of nature's most elegant machines - a literal nanoscale motor that's been running in every cell of every living thing for billions of years.

An Overview of feelings of knowing (FoK) - fundamental interoceptive patterns (FIP) feeling tones

The FoK-FIP feeling tones can be thought of as *distinct inner moods or body-mind sensations* arising from how mitochondria are functioning and communicating with the nervous system. Each one has both a **pleasant** and **unpleasant** version, depending on whether the system is in a balanced or stressed state.

⚡ FoK-FIP 1: The Heart/Lungs–"Triggering" Feeling Tone

Region: chest, and heart
Linked to: inner mitochondrial membrane (energy flow).

Pleasant FoK-FIP 1
Feels like:

- A warm, glowing, steady sense in the chest
- Breathing feels easy and full
- A quiet, grounded energy—like calm strength or gentle confidence
- Emotional tone: contentment, gratitude, safety

You might describe it as:
"I feel centered, warm, and okay just being here."

Unpleasant FoK-FIP 1
Feels like:

- Tightness or pressure in the chest
- Shallow breathing
- Heavy or drained feeling in the body core
- Emotional tone: worry, vulnerability, sadness

You might describe it as:
"It feels like something's off in my chest—like my energy is sinking or blocked."

💭 FoK-FIP 2: The Head/Brain–"Cognitive Binding" Feeling Tone

Region: head, face, behind the eyes
Linked to: mitochondrial intermembrane space (energy transfer and alertness)

Pleasant FoK-FIP 2
Feels like:

- A bright, clear, alert headspace
- Lightness behind the eyes
- Thoughts flow easily, and focus feels natural

- Emotional tone: curiosity, clarity, ease

You might describe it as:
“My mind feels open and light, like the air is crisp and I can see things clearly.”

Unpleasant FoK-FIP 2
Feels like:

- Pressure, buzzing, or foggy heaviness in the head
- Difficulty focusing; racing thoughts
- Sensory overload or tension behind the eyes
- Emotional tone: frustration, confusion, irritability

You might describe it as:
“It feels like my head is tight and cloudy, and I cannot stay focused."

FoK-FIP 3: The Abdominopelvic-"Propagating" Feeling Tone

Region: outer body, skin, and sense of space around you
Linked to: outer mitochondrial membrane (boundary sensing and connection)

Pleasant FoK-FIP 3
Feels like:

- A gentle openness toward the world
- The body feels spacious and lightly energized
- A sense of connection, safety, and calm engagement with others
- Emotional tone: trust, friendliness, ease in social space

You might describe it as:
“It feels easy to be around people; the air between us feels soft and comfortable.”

Unpleasant FoK-FIP 3
Feels like:

- Skin or outer body tension—like “armor” or static
- Feeling exposed or uneasy in one’s surroundings
- A shrinking or withdrawing sensation
- Emotional tone: social fatigue, isolation, defensiveness

You might describe it as:
“It feels like the world is pressing in, or I’m disconnected from everything.”

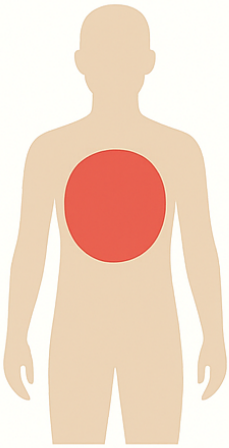
🧭 In Simple Terms

Each FoK-FIP tone is like a **body-based emotional compass**:

- **FoK-FIP 1** = how your heart and energy core feel
- **FoK-FIP 2** = how your mind and focus feel
- **FoK-FIP 3** = how your outer self feels in relation to the world

When the system is balanced, these tones feel **warm, clear, and open**.
When stressed, they feel **tight, cloudy, or closed** — signals that your internal energy and interoceptive network are out of tune.

FoK–FIP Feeling Tone 1

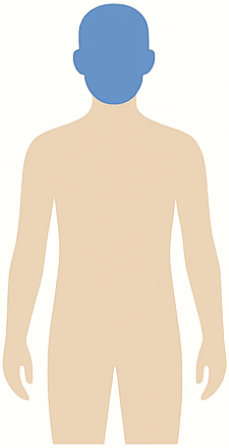


Heart Energy
(Inner Mitochondrial Membrane)

Pleasant version
Strong, open, energized

Unpleasant version
Tight, anxious, depleted

FoK–FIP Feeling Tone 2

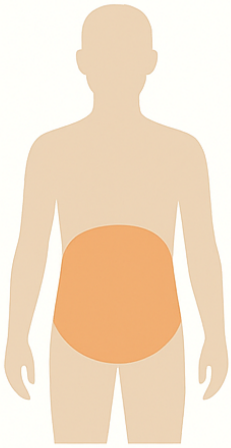


Head Energy
(Intermembrane Space)

Pleasant version
Clear, focused, awake

Unpleasant version
Foggy, pressured, overactive

FoK–FIP Feeling Tone 3



Core Energy
(Outer Mitochondrial Membrane)

Pleasant version
Grounded, safe, connected

Unpleasant version
Queasy, tense, unsettled

🌈 **In short:**

FoK–FIP Tone	Region	Pleasant Feel	Unpleasant Feel
1 – Heart	Chest	Vital, strong, energized	Tight, anxious, depleted
2 – Head	Brain	Clear, focused, awake	Foggy, pressured, overactive
3 – Core (Gut/ Genital)	Abdomen & Pelvis	Grounded, safe, connected	Queasy, tense, unsettled

How the Autonomic Nervous System Connects Body Energy to How We Feel

The *autonomic nervous system* (ANS) is the part of our nervous system that automatically controls functions such as heart rate, digestion, and breathing. It acts like a bridge between what's happening deep inside our cells and how we experience our body's internal state.

Inside each cell, mitochondria produce the energy we need to live. The ANS—especially its "fight or flight" branch, the **sympathetic nervous system (SNS)**—can directly influence mitochondrial function. When the SNS releases the chemical messenger **norepinephrine**, it activates receptors that speed up mitochondrial energy production. This process can also generate byproducts called *reactive oxygen species (ROS)* and change the structure and flexibility of mitochondrial membranes.

These shifts in mitochondrial activity ripple out to the rest of the body. They can alter how tissues use energy, how hard the heart pumps, how tight or relaxed our internal organs feel, and even how alert or calm our brain becomes.

In this way, the autonomic nervous system doesn't just control physical functions—it may also synchronize what's happening at the microscopic, cellular level with our overall physiological and emotional experience. In other words, it could be the bridge linking our body's energy state to our *felt sense* of being.

How Fascia Might Connect Energy Production Throughout Your Body

What is Fascia?
Fascia is a thin, stretchy connective tissue that forms a continuous network throughout the body. It wraps around every muscle, organ, bone, nerve, and blood vessel—much like a full-body suit or a spider web. Once thought to be just filler, fascia is now recognized as an active, sensing, and communicating system.

What are Mitochondria?
Mitochondria are tiny organelles inside cells that convert nutrients and oxygen into usable energy. Every active cell contains them, including those within fascial tissue.

How Fascia Might Connect Energy Production
Fascia may serve as a bridge between movement, cellular mechanics, and energy regulation:

- **Mechanical communication:** Movement creates tension throughout the fascial web, allowing mechanical signals to spread through tissues. These signals can activate mitochondria in different regions, coordinating energy production where it is needed.
- **Nutrient highways:** The fascial network forms pathways for oxygen, nutrients, and waste exchange, supporting the function and efficiency of mitochondria across tissues.
- **Electrical signaling:** When fascia is stretched or compressed, it can generate small electrical charges. These bioelectric signals may help synchronize metabolic activity and mitochondrial communication between body regions.
- **Energy efficiency through tensegrity:** Fascia distributes mechanical forces efficiently, much like a suspension bridge balancing tension and compression. This property could help optimize how energy is used and directed across the body.

The Big Picture
Fascia can be viewed as a connected infrastructure for energy regulation—a system that links mitochondria throughout the body into a coordinated metabolic network. Instead of isolated power plants, mitochondria may operate as interconnected nodes within this fascial web, adjusting activity in response to mechanical and electrical cues.

Current Perspective
This concept is part of an emerging field exploring how connective tissue and energy metabolism interact. Although still under investigation, it represents a promising framework for understanding how the body's structural and energetic systems function as one integrated whole.

The Cingulum: The Brain's "Connection Highway" for Body-Feeling Communication

The *cingulum* is a bundle of nerve fibers deep within the brain that serves as a major communication highway. It links regions responsible for thinking, emotion, body awareness, memory, and impulse control—making it central to how internal sensations and urges are experienced and regulated.

Connecting Body and Mind:
The cingulum links brain regions that detect internal body signals (such as heartbeat, gut tension, or energy levels) with areas that assign emotional meaning to them. This integration allows internal changes to be experienced as calmness, tension, or drive, rather than just raw physiological signals.

Balancing Emotion, Control, and Impulse:
By connecting emotion-processing regions (such as the cingulate cortex) with regulatory areas in the frontal lobe, the cingulum helps manage both emotional responses and impulses triggered by internal states. For instance, when the sympathetic nervous system raises heart rate or increases internal activation, the cingulum helps determine whether the resulting sensation becomes excitement, stress, or an impulse to act.

Coordinating Energy, Awareness, and Action:
The cingulum synchronizes mitochondrial and autonomic activity with conscious awareness and behavioral readiness. It allows the brain to integrate signals about the body's energy state—how much "fuel" is available or how activated tissues are—with the overall sense of being alert, fatigued, or primed for movement.

In essence, the cingulum acts as the bridge between internal energy states, emotions, and impulses. It transforms bodily shifts—such as changes in heart rate, breathing, or cellular energy—into felt experiences and action tendencies, shaping how internal states become both emotions and urges to respond.

Intervention: Mitochondrial Mindfulness Practice

🌿 1. Vagal Nerve Stimulation (VNS) with TENS Unit

What it is:
This is a gentle, non-invasive way to activate the **vagus nerve** — a major nerve that helps calm the body, regulate the heart, and balance stress responses. Using a small electrical stimulator (a **TENS unit**) with clips attached to the **left ear**, mild pulses are sent to the nerve to help it function more effectively.

How Stimulating the Vagus Nerve Can Influence the Cingulum

The *vagus nerve* is one of the body's main communication lines between the brain and internal organs. It carries signals that help control heart rate, digestion, breathing, and even inflammation. When this nerve is gently stimulated—either through medical devices, breathing exercises, or certain relaxation techniques—it can have powerful effects on the brain, including an area called the *cingulum*.

Here's how that works in simple terms:

- **Sending "Calm" Signals Upward:**
  The vagus nerve sends information from the body to the brain about how things are going internally. When it's activated, it carries signals of safety and relaxation—lower heart rate, steady breathing, and balanced digestion. These signals reach brain areas connected to the cingulum.

- **Soothing the Cingulum's Network:**
  The cingulum connects regions involved in emotion, attention, and body awareness. When the vagus nerve is stimulated, it helps calm overactive stress circuits and improves communication between emotional and thinking centers. This can make the cingulum's network more balanced and better at integrating body and mind.

- **Improving Emotional Regulation and Focus:**
  Because the cingulum plays a role in regulating emotions and attention, vagus nerve stimulation can help improve mood stability, reduce anxiety, and enhance focus. Essentially, the "bottom-up" calming signals from the vagus nerve help the cingulum process internal sensations in a more centered, less reactive way.

In short, **stimulating the vagus nerve helps the cingulum work more smoothly**, promoting better balance between body signals, emotional tone, and mental clarity. It's like turning down background noise so the brain can better tune in to what the body is really saying.

Equipment needed:

- **Ear** Clip Electrode Double-Sided Rubber Black Compatible for Tens Unit 7000, Universal Compatibility, Ear Clip Accessory, 1 Pair
- **TENS 7000 Digital TENS Unit**

How to do it:

- Use the **double-sided ear clip** on the **tragus** (the small flap in front of your ear canal).
- It doesn't matter which clip side is inside or outside — both sides conduct the stimulation.
- **Treat only one ear at a time** (never both), as stimulating both sides can slow the heart too much.
- Set the TENS unit as follows:
- **Pulse width:** 250 microseconds (μs)
- **Frequency (rate)**: 25 Hertz (Hz)
- **Time:** 30 minutes
- **Intensity:** Turn up the level until you can feel a light tingling, but **stop before it feels uncomfortable**.

Schedule:

- Do this **twice a day for 30 minutes** each, with several hours in between.
- If it feels uncomfortable or causes side effects (like irritation or dizziness), shorten the time to **15–20 minutes**.
- It takes **at least one week** (and often two) of consistent use to start noticing results.
- This is not a "one-and-done" treatment — it works best with **regular, ongoing use**.

Warnings:

- Never treat both ears at once — this can lower heart rate too much (called **bradycardia**).
- If you have any **heart rhythm problems (arrhythmias)**, a **medical doctor must approve** the use of this therapy before you begin.

Goal:
By gently stimulating the vagus nerve, you're helping your body's natural calming system

activate more easily — improving heart regulation, digestion, emotional balance, and overall stress resilience.

🧘 2. Mindfulness Practice Focused on FoK–FIP Feeling Tones

This section of the practice aims to:

- Strengthen awareness of the body's internal signals and how they connect to emotional states.
- Encourage perception from the **viewpoint of consciousness itself**—the quiet awareness that observes sensations and thoughts—rather than from the idea of being a separate "human self."

✨ Formal Mindfulness Practice (Meditation Time)

Focus:

- Choose one FoK–FIP Feeling Tone:
  - **Heart (1)** – linked with drive and activation
  - **Head (2)** – linked with focus and mental clarity
  - **Abdomen/Pelvic Region (3)** – linked with grounding and balance

Practice Steps:

- Sit or lie quietly and bring gentle attention to the chosen region.
- Notice the sensations exactly as they are — **pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral** — without trying to change them.
- Stay with the **direct feeling** rather than connecting it to stories, memories, or people.
- Recognize that awareness itself is observing the sensation; it is **not a person** doing the observing.
- Begin with **5 minutes daily**, increasing by 5 minutes each week until reaching **30 minutes**.

Purpose:

- Builds clear connection with the body's internal signals.
- Reduces emotional reactivity and supports nervous system balance.
- Shifts perception from *"I am feeling this"* to *"This feeling is being observed within awareness."*
- Begins the process of recognizing the "self" not as a separate human identity, but as the quiet awareness—or consciousness—that experiences thoughts, feelings, and sensations.

☀️ Mindfulness Throughout the Day

- Notice when emotions appear—such as stress, sadness, or frustration—and recognize that each one connects to a specific **FoK–FIP feeling tone**.
- Pause for a moment and sense **where** it is felt: in the **heart**, **head**, or **abdomen/pelvic region**.
- From the calm **viewpoint of awareness itself**, simply observe the sensation without analyzing or judging it.
- Let the **FoK–FIP feeling tone** become the focus—a gentle **anchor** for attention—so the experience can unfold naturally in open awareness, without drifting into thoughts about people, situations, or stories.

Essential Insight:
Through consistent practice, sensations and emotions become part of a wider field of consciousness rather than personal struggle. The experience shifts from *"something happening to me"* to *"a moment arising within awareness."*

💡 Putting It All Together

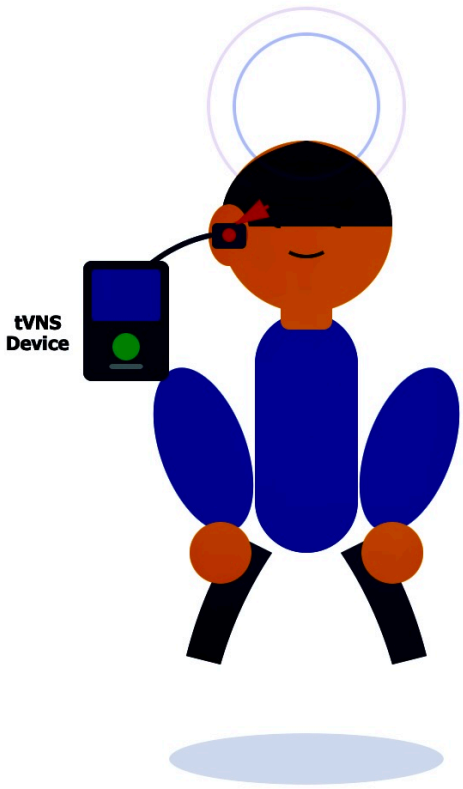
These two approaches — **vagal nerve stimulation** and **FoK–FIP mindfulness** — complement each other:

- **VNS** works from the **outside-in**, calming the body through nerve signaling.
- **Mindfulness** works from the **inside-out**, strengthening your awareness and self-regulation.

Together, they form a gentle, body–mind rebalancing system that supports both **physical calm** and **emotional clarity**.

2a. Formal Mindfulness Practice (Meditation Time)

with Transcutaneous Vagal Nerve Stimulation (tVNS)



tVNS Protocol Parameters

Device Placement
Double-sided ear clip on tragus

Pulse Width
250 microseconds (μs)

Frequency
25 Hertz (Hz)

Duration per Session
30 minutes

Intensity
Comfortable level
(not uncomfortable)

Frequency of Treatment
Twice daily × 30 minutes

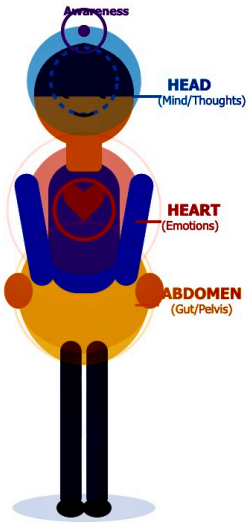
⚠ **Important:** Treat only ONE ear per session

Note: Combine tVNS with formal mindfulness meditation practice for synergistic effects on vagal tone and parasympathetic activation.

2b. Mindfulness Throughout the Day

FoK-FIP Framework: Feelings of Knowing - Fundamental Interoceptive Patterns

Three Somatic Centers of Awareness



1 RECOGNIZE

Notice when emotions arise and their linkage with **FoK-FIP feeling tones**. Become aware of the emotional experience as it emerges in the present moment.

2 PAUSE & LOCATE

Briefly pause and notice **where the feeling tone is sensed**:

- **Head** (mental/cognitive sensations)
- **Heart** (emotional/chest sensations)
- **Abdomen/Pelvic region** (gut feelings/instincts)

3 OBSERVE WITHOUT JUDGEMENT

As the **viewpoint of consciousness**, observe the sensation directly—without analysis or judgement. Simply witness the experience as it is.

4 USE FoK-FIP AS ANCHOR

Use the **FoK-FIP feeling tone itself** as the focus and "mental anchor." Allow the experience to unfold naturally in **open awareness** rather than being carried away into thinking about people, places, and things.

Key Practice Point

*The feeling tone becomes the anchor—not thoughts about the feeling, but the **raw sensation itself**. Stay with the direct experience and let conceptual thinking fall away.*

FoK-FIP: Feelings of Knowing - Fundamental Interoceptive Patterns represent the basic somatic patterns through which consciousness recognizes and processes experience through bodily sensation before cognitive elaboration.

Overview of How the Effects of the Mitochondrial Mindfulness Practice Can Be Tested

To determine whether vagal nerve stimulation and mindfulness practices are working, a few simple, noninvasive tests can be used to assess how the body, mind, and behavior change over time.

I. Measuring Eye Temperature with Infrared Imaging

We'll use a special **infrared camera** to measure tiny temperature changes at one specific spot — the **medial caruncle** (the small, pink corner of the **eye**, near the nose).

This area is highly sensitive to changes in the **sympathetic nervous system**, which controls stress, alertness, and relaxation.

- When the body is **stressed or aroused**, this spot tends to **cool down** slightly.
- When the body is **calm and balanced**, it tends to **warm up** a little.

By measuring the temperature of just this one precise area before and after the interventions, we can see how much the treatments help the nervous system settle and restore balance.

II. Questionnaires About Emotions and Behavior

We'll also use short, validated questionnaires that ask about:

- **Frustration or irritability**
- **Impulse control** (how easily one can pause before reacting)
- **Mood or depression levels**

These emotional and behavioral measures help us understand how the treatments might be improving emotional regulation — and we'll compare those results to changes in the **eye temperature** readings.

III. Measuring Gait and Movement

We'll record and analyze **how the body moves** — such as walking rhythm, stride length, or smoothness of motion.
When the sympathetic system calms down, movement often becomes smoother and more balanced. Tracking gait helps us see how the body's motor system responds to improved nervous system regulation.

In The Testing Environment

If the interventions are helping, we might see:

- A **slight increase or stabilization** in temperature at the **left eye's medial caruncle** (showing a calmer sympathetic response).
- **Improved impulse control and lower frustration** on questionnaires.
- **Smoother, more coordinated movement** patterns in gait measurements.

All of these changes together can show that the body and brain are becoming more balanced — reflecting healthier regulation of the **FoK-FIP feeling tones** and overall autonomic function.