

Taha Kai – Nuku i tō Puku

An Exploratory Reflection on Mātauranga Māori, Rhythm, and Wellbeing

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Abstract

This article presents an exploratory reflection on Taha Kai – Nuku i tō Puku, a framework that brings Mātauranga Māori into dialogue with contemporary research on digestion, stress, metabolism, and rhythm. The work does not offer medical advice or clinical claims. Instead, it reflects on how Indigenous concepts of rhythm, balance, and relationship may inform personal understandings of wellbeing.

Drawing on Māori perspectives that locate the Puku as a centre of mauri, intuition, and emotional processing, this article considers how disturbances in digestion and metabolic rhythm are often experienced alongside stress, identity pressure, shame (Whakamā), and cultural disconnection. Contemporary scientific literature is referenced to contextualise these reflections without asserting equivalence between knowledge systems.

Author Positioning

I am not a medical professional, and this article does not diagnose, treat, or prevent disease. The reflections presented here arise from lived experience, engagement with Mātauranga Māori, and sustained reading of interdisciplinary literature. Scientific research is used to support conceptual exploration and dialogue, not to establish therapeutic efficacy.

Introduction: Deepening Understanding of the Puku

This article builds on earlier work within Taha Kai – Nuku i tō Puku, which explored restoring relationship and sovereignty in relation to kai. In this reflective extension, I turn more explicitly to the Puku as a site of rhythm, awareness, and lived experience.

Within te Ao Māori, the Puku is understood as a point where tinana, hinengaro, and wairua intersect. Rather than viewing digestion as a purely mechanical process, Māori knowledge positions the Puku as responsive to emotion, environment, and rhythm. This framing provides a foundation for the explorations that follow.

Rhythm as an Interpretive Lens

In my work, the concepts of pōturi (slowness), kori (flow), and hohoro (speed) have emerged as useful ways of describing embodied rhythm. These are not fixed categories but contextual states that shift in response to environment, stress, and life demands.

Prolonged dominance of any one rhythm may be experienced as discomfort or imbalance. When placed alongside contemporary discussions of stress physiology and gut–brain communication, these Māori concepts offer an interpretive bridge for understanding lived experience without collapsing distinct knowledge systems into one another.

Ahi i roto i te Puku

The expression *ahi i roto i te Puku*, often translated as 'fire in the belly', is used here to name experiences of internal heat, agitation, urgency, or pressure. Rather than framing this state as pathology, I interpret it as a signal of disrupted rhythm.

Cooling practices such as slowing breath, simplifying kai, restoring ritual around meals, and reconnecting with whenua and whānau are described as ways of inviting balance. In my observation, when rhythm begins to settle, clarity and steadiness often follow naturally.

Metabolic Concepts as Symbolic Frameworks

This article references metabolic concepts such as fasting, ketosis, and autophagy as explanatory and symbolic frameworks rather than prescriptive interventions. Through a Māori lens, periods of restraint may be understood as *Tapu*—a protective boundary—followed by return to *noa*.

Alignment with Te Maramataka provides a cyclical structure for effort and rest, allowing periods of simplification to be followed by nourishment, consolidation, and recovery.

Conclusion

This work does not seek to offer solutions or protocols. Its contribution lies in providing a reflective, Indigenous-informed way of thinking about wellbeing as rhythmic and relational.

Across Mātauranga Māori and contemporary research, a shared insight emerges: bodies respond to safety, timing, and respect. *Taha Kai – Nuku i tō Puku* is offered as an invitation to listen more closely to rhythm rather than impose control.

References

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