The Craniofacial Bioenergetic Model:

Integrating Mechanobiology and Cellular Bioenergetics in Craniofacial Remodeling

Craniofacial Bioenergetic Model

James M. Bronson DDS, FIAO, James A. Bronson, DMD, Julia M. Bronson, DMD

Abstract

Background
Orthodontic tooth movement and craniofacial growth are traditionally explained through biomechanical models emphasizing the role of mechanical forces acting on periodontal ligament and alveolar bone. While these models describe how mechanical stimuli initiate tissue remodeling, the cellular processes responsible for bone resorption, bone formation, and connective tissue adaptation require significant metabolic energy generated through mitochondrial respiration.

Objective
This article proposes the **Craniofacial Bioenergetic Model**, a conceptual framework integrating mechanobiology, mitochondrial metabolism, and photobiomodulation to better understand craniofacial tissue remodeling.

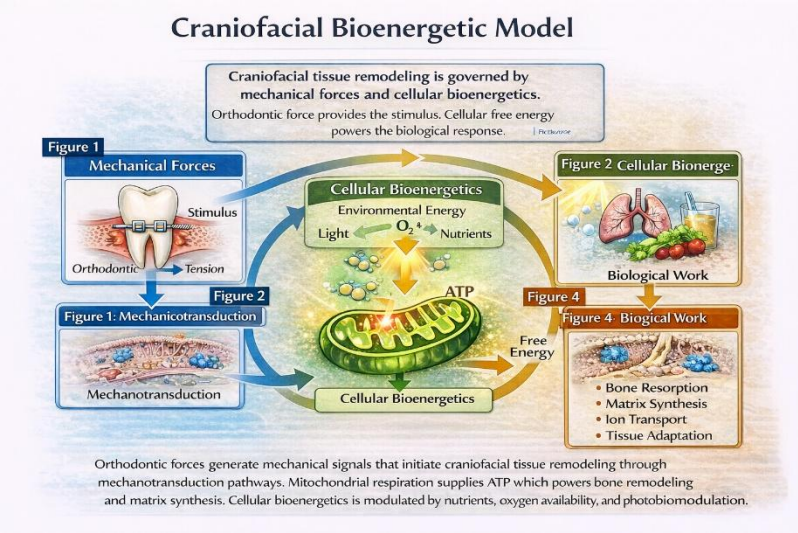
Conceptual Framework
Within this model, orthodontic forces generate mechanical stimuli that activate mechanotransduction pathways regulating osteoclast and osteoblast activity. Mitochondrial oxidative phosphorylation produces adenosine triphosphate (ATP), which provides cellular free energy required for biological work including bone remodeling and extracellular matrix turnover. Photobiomodulation introduces photonic energy capable of interacting with mitochondrial chromophores such as cytochrome c oxidase, potentially influencing mitochondrial respiration and ATP production. Oxygen availability further supports mitochondrial metabolism through oxidative phosphorylation.

Implications
The Craniofacial Bioenergetic Model (CBM) suggests that craniofacial tissue remodeling may depend on both mechanical stimulation and cellular metabolic capacity.

Conclusion
This framework proposes that craniofacial tissue remodeling arises from the interaction between mechanical signaling pathways and mitochondrial bioenergetic capacity.

Novelty of the Present Work

This article introduces the Craniofacial Bioenergetic Model, a conceptual framework integrating mechanobiology and mitochondrial metabolism in craniofacial tissue remodeling. While existing orthodontic theories emphasize the role of mechanical forces in directing skeletal adaptation, the present model proposes that cellular bioenergetic capacity represents an additional determinant of tissue remodeling. By linking mechanical signaling pathways with mitochondrial ATP production and environmental energy inputs—including oxygen availability and photobiomodulation—the Craniofacial Bioenergetic Model provides a unifying biological perspective and generates testable hypotheses for future interdisciplinary research.



Key Points

1. Orthodontic tissue remodeling is an energy-dependent biological process.
Bone resorption, bone formation, and connective tissue adaptation require ATP-dependent cellular activity generated through mitochondrial metabolism.

2. Mechanical forces initiate craniofacial tissue remodeling through mechanotransduction pathways.
Orthodontic forces create compression and tension zones within the periodontal ligament that regulate osteoclast and osteoblast activity.

3. Cellular bioenergetics provides the free energy required for biological work.
Mitochondrial oxidative phosphorylation produces ATP that powers cellular processes involved in craniofacial tissue remodeling.

4. The Craniofacial Bioenergetic Model integrates mechanical forces and cellular metabolism.
This framework proposes that craniofacial tissue adaptation results from the interaction between mechanobiological signaling and mitochondrial bioenergetic capacity.

Introduction

Craniofacial growth and orthodontic tooth movement represent complex biological processes involving coordinated cellular responses within periodontal ligament, alveolar bone, and surrounding connective tissues. Orthodontic treatment applies controlled mechanical forces to teeth, generating localized stress within the periodontal ligament that stimulates bone resorption and bone formation.[12–16]

Mechanical loading of craniofacial tissues activates mechanotransduction pathways that regulate inflammatory mediators, cytokine signaling, and cellular differentiation.[13–17] These biological processes allow teeth to migrate through alveolar bone while maintaining structural integrity of surrounding tissues.

Although biomechanical models explain how orthodontic forces initiate tissue remodeling, they do not fully account for the metabolic requirements necessary for cells to perform the work of tissue adaptation. Bone remodeling requires osteoclast-mediated resorption of mineralized matrix and osteoblast-mediated synthesis of new bone tissue, processes that depend on ATP-dependent cellular metabolism.[7–10]

Advances in mitochondrial biology have highlighted the importance of cellular bioenergetics in regulating tissue remodeling and cellular activity. Mitochondria generate ATP through oxidative phosphorylation, providing the free energy necessary for numerous cellular processes including protein synthesis, cytoskeletal contraction, and extracellular matrix turnover.[7–10]

Photobiomodulation (PBM) has been investigated as a method for influencing mitochondrial metabolism through the application of red and near-infrared light capable of interacting with

mitochondrial chromophores such as cytochrome c oxidase.[1–6] Photon absorption may influence electron transport within the respiratory chain and potentially increase ATP production.

These observations suggest that craniofacial tissue remodeling may be influenced not only by mechanical forces but also by cellular bioenergetic capacity. While mechanobiology explains how mechanical stimuli initiate tissue remodeling, the execution of these processes requires metabolic energy generated through mitochondrial respiration.

The Craniofacial Bioenergetic Model (CBM) is proposed as a conceptual framework suggesting that craniofacial tissue remodeling is governed by the interaction between mechanical stimuli that initiate mechanotransduction pathways and mitochondrial metabolism that supplies the cellular free energy required for biological work. (Figure 1)

Historically, orthodontic biology has been interpreted through biomechanical principles describing how mechanical forces influence periodontal ligament and alveolar bone remodeling. Functional theories of craniofacial development have further emphasized the influence of surrounding soft tissues and physiological systems on skeletal growth.

Orthodontic biology may therefore be understood as the interaction of three fundamental systems: mechanical forces that initiate tissue remodeling, functional environments that influence craniofacial growth, and cellular bioenergetics that provide the free energy required for biological work. Within this framework, the present article focuses on the role of cellular bioenergetics in craniofacial tissue remodeling.

Understanding the energetic requirements of craniofacial tissue remodeling may provide new perspectives on orthodontic treatment, tissue healing, and the biological limits of skeletal adaptation.

The Craniofacial Bioenergetic Model (CBM) is proposed as a conceptual framework integrating mechanobiology and mitochondrial metabolism to better understand how cellular energy systems contribute to craniofacial tissue remodeling.

The figures presented throughout this article illustrate the progressive development of the Craniofacial Bioenergetic Model. Figure 1 introduces the broader framework of orthodontic biology as the interaction of three fundamental systems: mechanical forces, functional environments, and cellular bioenergetics. Figures 2 and 3 examine the mechanobiological and metabolic processes that support craniofacial tissue remodeling, including mechanotransduction pathways and mitochondrial ATP production. Figure 4 illustrates the interaction between photobiomodulation and mitochondrial metabolism. These elements are integrated in Figure 5, which presents the Craniofacial Bioenergetic Model as a unified framework describing the interaction between mechanical signaling and cellular bioenergetic capacity in craniofacial tissue adaptation.

The present article introduces the Bronson Craniofacial Bioenergetic Model and proposes a bioenergetic principle of craniofacial remodeling integrating mechanobiology and mitochondrial metabolism.

Mechanical signals direct craniofacial remodeling, while cellular bioenergetics supplies the free energy required for the biological work of tissue adaptation.

The following sections examine the mechanobiological and bioenergetic principles that form the foundation of this model.

Mechanobiology of Orthodontic Tissue Remodeling

Orthodontic tooth movement is initiated through controlled mechanical forces that generate compression and tension zones within the periodontal ligament.[12–16] On the compression side, reduced vascular perfusion and mechanical stress stimulate osteoclast recruitment and bone resorption. On the tension side, mechanical stretching promotes osteoblast differentiation and deposition of new bone matrix.[13–17]

The periodontal ligament acts as a mechanosensitive structure capable of translating mechanical forces into biochemical signals that regulate gene expression, inflammatory signaling, and cellular differentiation.[13–17] These processes allow craniofacial tissues to respond dynamically to functional and orthodontic forces.

The relationship between mechanical loading and skeletal adaptation has long been recognized in bone biology. Wolff's Law proposed that bone architecture adapts in response to mechanical stress, while Frost's mechanostat theory further described how bone remodeling is regulated by mechanical strain thresholds that stimulate osteoblastic bone formation or osteoclastic resorption.[11] These models emphasize the role of mechanical forces in directing skeletal remodeling. The Craniofacial Bioenergetic Model extends this perspective by incorporating cellular bioenergetics as a complementary determinant of tissue adaptation. While mechanical forces determine the spatial distribution of remodeling signals within craniofacial tissues, mitochondrial metabolism supplies the cellular free energy required for the biological work of bone remodeling and connective tissue adaptation. Osteoclasts and osteoblasts must synthesize enzymes, remodel extracellular matrix, and coordinate cytoskeletal activity, all of which require continuous ATP production. Orthodontic forces generate compression and tension zones within the periodontal ligament that regulate osteoclast and osteoblast activity (Figure 2).[12–17]

While mechanobiological theories explain how skeletal tissues respond to mechanical forces, the energetic requirements necessary to perform this remodeling represent an additional biological dimension.

Mitochondrial Metabolism and Cellular Free Energy

Mitochondria serve as the primary site of ATP production through oxidative phosphorylation.[7–10] Electrons derived from metabolic substrates pass through the electron transport chain, generating a proton gradient across the mitochondrial membrane that drives ATP synthesis.

ATP functions as a carrier of chemical free energy within cells. Hydrolysis of ATP releases free energy that can be used to power biological work including ion transport, protein synthesis, cytoskeletal motion, and extracellular matrix remodeling.[7–10]

Biological work requires the conversion of stored energy into usable free energy, a fundamental thermodynamic principle governing cellular metabolism.

Bone remodeling represents a form of biological work performed by specialized cells using ATP-derived free energy. The capacity of craniofacial tissues to remodel in response to mechanical stimuli therefore depends on the metabolic capacity of cells responsible for tissue adaptation.

(Figure 3)

Photobiomodulation and Mitochondrial Activation

Photobiomodulation involves the application of red and near-infrared light within the biological optical window of approximately 600–1100 nm.[1–6] These wavelengths can penetrate biological tissues and interact with mitochondrial chromophores.

Cytochrome c oxidase, a key enzyme within the mitochondrial electron transport chain, has been proposed as a primary photoreceptor for PBM.[1–6] Photon absorption may influence electron transport and mitochondrial membrane potential, potentially increasing ATP production.

Experimental studies have explored the influence of PBM on cellular proliferation, inflammation modulation, and tissue repair processes.[18–21] Although the precise mechanisms remain under investigation, these findings suggest that photonic energy may influence mitochondrial metabolism and cellular bioenergetics.

(Figure 4)

Oxygen Availability and Mitochondrial Respiration

Mitochondrial oxidative phosphorylation requires oxygen as the terminal electron acceptor in the electron transport chain.[22–24] Oxygen delivery to tissues therefore plays a critical role in cellular energy metabolism.

Variations in airway physiology and respiratory function may influence oxygen availability within craniofacial tissues. Although the relationship between airway physiology and craniofacial growth remains an area of ongoing investigation, oxygen-dependent mitochondrial respiration represents a fundamental determinant of cellular metabolic capacity.

The Energy Framework of Craniofacial Biology

Biological systems operate according to thermodynamic principles in which work can occur only when energy is converted into usable free energy. Within living cells, mitochondrial metabolism generates ATP that provides the free energy necessary to perform biological work.

Craniofacial tissue remodeling represents a form of biological work requiring coordinated cellular activity including bone resorption, matrix synthesis, and connective tissue adaptation. Mechanical forces determine where remodeling signals occur, while mitochondrial metabolism supplies the cellular free energy required to perform the work of tissue remodeling.

Environmental energy sources including nutrients, oxygen, and photonic energy influence this metabolic system. Together these inputs support mitochondrial respiration and ATP production, enabling cellular processes necessary for craniofacial adaptation.

The Craniofacial Bioenergetic Model

The Craniofacial Bioenergetic Model integrates mechanobiology and cellular metabolism into a unified framework describing craniofacial tissue remodeling (Figure 5). Within this model, mechanical forces provide the spatial signals that initiate tissue adaptation through mechanotransduction pathways regulating osteoclast and osteoblast activity, while mitochondrial metabolism supplies the cellular free energy required for the biological work of bone remodeling and connective tissue adaptation.

According to this model, mechanical forces provide the spatial signals that initiate tissue adaptation through mechanotransduction pathways regulating bone remodeling.[13–17], while mitochondrial metabolism supplies the cellular free energy required for the biological work of bone remodeling and connective tissue adaptation.[7–10]

Environmental energy inputs—including nutrients, oxygen availability, and photonic energy delivered through photobiomodulation[1–6] support mitochondrial respiration and influence the cellular bioenergetic environment. Oxygen availability supports oxidative phosphorylation and mitochondrial respiration.[22–24]

These interacting systems collectively influence the capacity of craniofacial tissues to respond to mechanical stimuli.

The preceding sections describe several biological systems that contribute to craniofacial tissue remodeling. Mechanical forces acting on the periodontal ligament initiate cellular signaling through mechanotransduction pathways that regulate osteoclast and osteoblast activity. Mitochondrial metabolism generates adenosine triphosphate (ATP), providing the cellular free energy required for biological work including bone remodeling and extracellular matrix turnover. Environmental energy inputs—including nutrients, oxygen, and photonic energy delivered through photobiomodulation—support mitochondrial respiration and influence cellular metabolic activity.

Taken together, these interacting systems suggest that craniofacial tissue adaptation may be governed by both mechanical signaling and cellular bioenergetic capacity. These relationships are summarized in the **Craniofacial Bioenergetic Model**, which integrates mechanobiology, mitochondrial metabolism, and environmental energy inputs into a unified framework describing craniofacial t Craniofacial tissue remodeling may be conceptualized as the interaction between mechanical signaling pathways and cellular bioenergetic capacity.

The CBM Equation:

Craniofacial Remodeling = Mechanical Signals × Cellular Bioenergetic Capacity

Within this framework, mechanical forces determine the spatial pattern of remodeling, while mitochondrial metabolism supplies the cellular free energy required to perform the biological work of tissue adaptation.

Principle of Craniofacial Bioenergetics

The Craniofacial Bioenergetic Model proposes that craniofacial tissue remodeling is governed by the interaction between mechanical signaling pathways and cellular bioenergetic capacity. Mechanical forces acting on craniofacial structures activate mechanotransduction pathways that regulate osteoclastic and osteoblastic activity, thereby determining the spatial distribution of tissue remodeling. Mitochondrial oxidative phosphorylation generates adenosine triphosphate (ATP), which provides the cellular free energy required to perform the biological work of bone remodeling and connective tissue adaptation. Environmental energy inputs—including nutrients, oxygen availability, and photonic energy delivered through photobiomodulation—support mitochondrial metabolism and influence the cellular bioenergetic environment in which craniofacial tissues respond to mechanical stimuli.

Bioenergetic Principle of Craniofacial Remodeling

Craniofacial tissue remodeling is governed by the interaction between mechanical signaling pathways and cellular bioenergetic capacity. Mechanical forces determine the spatial pattern of tissue adaptation through mechanotransduction pathways regulating osteoclast and osteoblast activity, while mitochondrial oxidative phosphorylation supplies the cellular free energy required for the biological work of bone remodeling and connective tissue adaptation.

CBM Law:
Mechanical signals direct craniofacial remodeling, while cellular bioenergetics powers the biological work required for tissue adaptation.

Implications for Craniofacial Growth and Development

Craniofacial development involves interactions among genetic regulation, functional environment, mechanical forces, and cellular metabolism.[25–27] Mechanobiology demonstrates that physical forces influence tissue growth through mechanotransduction pathways that regulate cellular behavior.

Because mitochondrial metabolism plays a central role in both tissue remodeling and neural activity, interactions among craniofacial development, oxygen availability, and cellular bioenergetics may have broader implications for physiological systems including neurodevelopment.

Mitochondrial metabolism provides the energy required for cellular proliferation, migration, and matrix synthesis during tissue development. From a bioenergetic perspective, craniofacial growth can therefore be understood as a process in which mechanical signals guide tissue remodeling while mitochondrial metabolism supplies the energy required for biological work.

Testable Predictions

The Craniofacial Bioenergetic Model generates several testable hypotheses:

1. Mitochondrial metabolic activity may influence the biological response of craniofacial tissues to orthodontic force.
2. Experimental activation of mitochondrial metabolism through photobiomodulation may influence bone remodeling processes.
3. Oxygen availability may influence mitochondrial respiration and therefore affect cellular metabolic capacity during craniofacial tissue remodeling.

Future Research Agenda: Testing the Craniofacial Bioenergetic Model

The Craniofacial Bioenergetic Model generates several avenues for interdisciplinary investigation into the metabolic determinants of craniofacial tissue remodeling.

Cellular Bioenergetics and Orthodontic Remodeling

Future studies may investigate how mitochondrial respiration, ATP production, and cellular metabolic activity change in periodontal ligament cells, osteoblasts, and osteoclasts during orthodontic tooth movement.

Photobiomodulation and Mitochondrial Activation

Experimental studies examining the effects of photobiomodulation on mitochondrial membrane potential, ATP production, and inflammatory signaling in craniofacial tissues may provide insight into how photonic energy influences cellular metabolism.

Oxygen Availability and Craniofacial Metabolism

Investigations into how oxygen delivery influences mitochondrial respiration and metabolic activity in craniofacial tissues may clarify the role of oxygen-dependent bioenergetics in skeletal adaptation.

Metabolic Determinants of Skeletal Adaptation

Integrating mechanobiology with cellular metabolism may help identify metabolic factors that influence the biological limits of craniofacial tissue remodeling and orthodontic treatment response.

Clinical Implications

The Craniofacial Bioenergetic Model expands the traditional biomechanical perspective of orthodontics by incorporating cellular metabolism as a determinant of tissue remodeling capacity. Understanding the metabolic environment in which craniofacial tissues respond to mechanical forces may provide new insights into orthodontic treatment, tissue healing, and musculoskeletal adaptation.

Reviewer Anticipation Paragraph

While the Craniofacial Bioenergetic Model is presented as a conceptual framework, it is grounded in established biological principles derived from mechanobiology, mitochondrial physiology, and cellular bioenergetics. Mechanotransduction pathways regulating osteoclast and osteoblast activity are well documented in orthodontic tissue remodeling.[13–17] Similarly, mitochondrial oxidative phosphorylation and ATP production represent the primary source of cellular free energy supporting biological work in living tissues.[7–10] Photobiomodulation research has further demonstrated that red and near-infrared light can interact with mitochondrial chromophores such as cytochrome c oxidase and may influence cellular metabolism.[1–6]

While direct experimental investigation of mitochondrial bioenergetics in orthodontic tissue remodeling remains limited, extensive research demonstrates that bone remodeling, cellular proliferation, and extracellular matrix synthesis are fundamentally energy-dependent processes supported by mitochondrial ATP production.

The purpose of the Craniofacial Bioenergetic Model is not to replace existing biomechanical explanations of orthodontic tooth movement but to extend them by incorporating cellular bioenergetics as a determinant of tissue remodeling capacity. By integrating these established biological principles, the model generates testable hypotheses that may guide future experimental and clinical investigations into the metabolic determinants of craniofacial tissue adaptation.

Limitations and Future Research

The Craniofacial Bioenergetic Model is presented as a conceptual framework integrating mechanobiology, mitochondrial metabolism, and photobiomodulation in craniofacial tissue remodeling. While each of these components is supported by existing biological research, the relationships among mechanical forces, mitochondrial bioenergetics, and craniofacial tissue adaptation remain an area of ongoing investigation. The present model is intended to synthesize current knowledge from multiple disciplines rather than provide definitive experimental evidence for all proposed interactions.

Further research is necessary to investigate how variations in mitochondrial metabolic activity influence cellular responses during orthodontic tooth movement and craniofacial growth. Experimental studies examining mitochondrial respiration, ATP production, and cellular energy metabolism in periodontal and skeletal tissues may help clarify the role of cellular bioenergetics in tissue remodeling. Additional investigations exploring the influence of photobiomodulation on mitochondrial activity in craniofacial tissues may also contribute to understanding how photonic energy interacts with cellular metabolism.

Future interdisciplinary research integrating orthodontics, cellular physiology, and bioenergetics may provide greater insight into the metabolic determinants of craniofacial tissue remodeling and the potential role of cellular energy systems in supporting biological adaptation.

Conclusion

Craniofacial tissue remodeling arises from the interaction of mechanical forces, cellular signaling pathways, and metabolic energy production. The Craniofacial Bioenergetic Model integrates these factors into a conceptual framework suggesting that craniofacial adaptation may depend on both mechanical stimuli and cellular bioenergetic capacity.

Future research examining mitochondrial metabolism, photobiomodulation, and oxygen-dependent cellular respiration may provide further insight into the biological mechanisms governing craniofacial growth and orthodontic tissue remodeling.

The Craniofacial Bioenergetic Model (CBM) integrates mechanobiology and mitochondrial metabolism into a unified framework describing craniofacial tissue remodeling. **Mechanical forces direct tissue adaptation, while cellular bioenergetics powers the biological work required for craniofacial remodeling.**

The Craniofacial Bioenergetic Model integrates principles from mechanobiology, mitochondrial physiology, and craniofacial biology into a unified conceptual framework describing tissue remodeling. Mechanical forces determine where biological adaptation occurs through mechanotransduction pathways, while mitochondrial oxidative phosphorylation provides the cellular free energy required for the biological work of bone remodeling and connective tissue adaptation. Understanding the interaction between mechanical signaling and cellular bioenergetics may therefore provide new perspectives on craniofacial growth, orthodontic tissue remodeling, and the metabolic determinants of skeletal adaptation.

CBM Law: Mechanical signals direct craniofacial remodeling, while cellular bioenergetics powers the biological work required for tissue adaptation.

Model Summary Box

The Craniofacial Bioenergetic Model (CBM)

Concept

The Craniofacial Bioenergetic Model proposes that craniofacial tissue remodeling is governed by the interaction between mechanical stimuli and cellular bioenergetic capacity.

Mechanical Component

Orthodontic and functional forces generate mechanical stimuli within craniofacial tissues that activate mechanotransduction pathways regulating osteoclast and osteoblast activity.

Bioenergetic Component

Mitochondrial oxidative phosphorylation produces adenosine triphosphate (ATP), providing cellular free energy required for biological work including bone remodeling and connective tissue adaptation.

Energy Inputs

Cellular bioenergetics is supported by environmental energy sources including:

- nutrients supplying metabolic substrates
- oxygen enabling mitochondrial respiration
- photonic energy delivered through photobiomodulation

Central Principle

Craniofacial tissue remodeling occurs when mechanical signaling pathways interact with mitochondrial metabolism to perform the biological work required for tissue adaptation.

Figure Legends

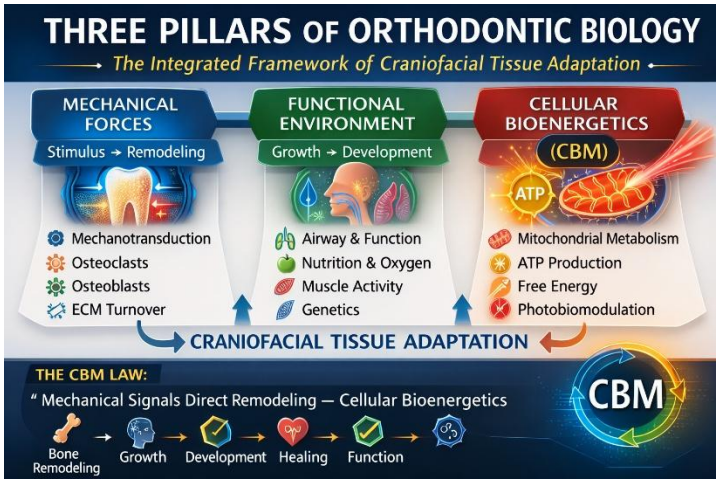


Figure 1

Three Pillars of Orthodontic Biology

Cellular Bioenergetics (**(CBM)**

Conceptual framework illustrating three interacting systems that influence craniofacial tissue adaptation: mechanical forces that initiate tissue remodeling, functional environments that influence craniofacial growth, and cellular bioenergetics that supply the free energy required for biological work. **CBM Law:** Mechanical signals direct craniofacial remodeling — cellular bioenergetics powers the biological work.

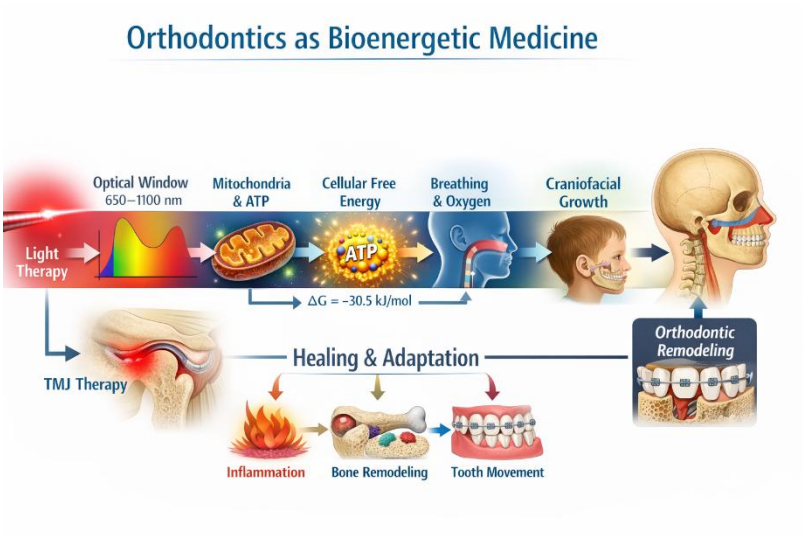


Figure 2
Mechanobiology of orthodontic tissue remodeling.

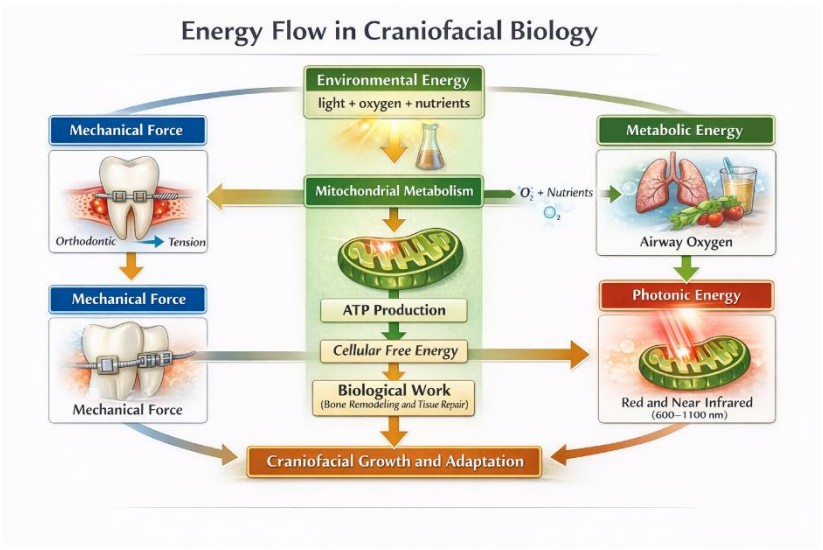


Figure 3
Energy flow and cellular free energy in craniofacial biology.

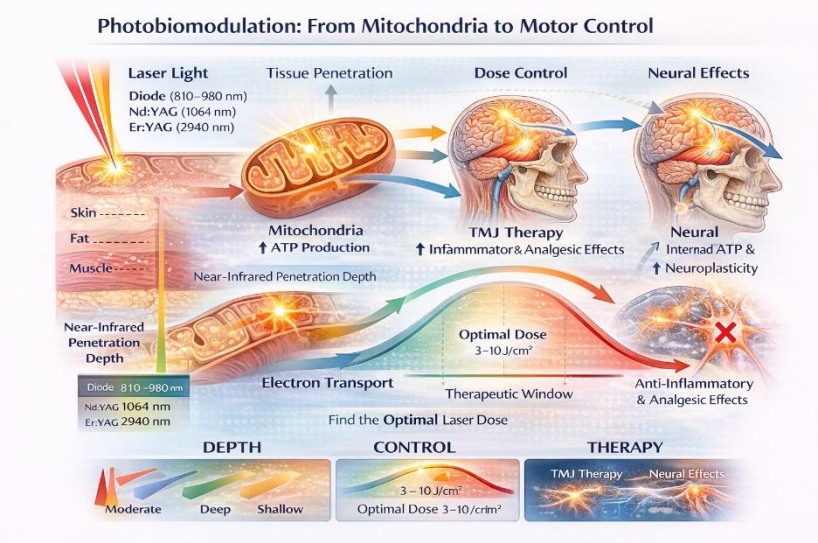


Figure 4
Photobiomodulation and mitochondrial activation.

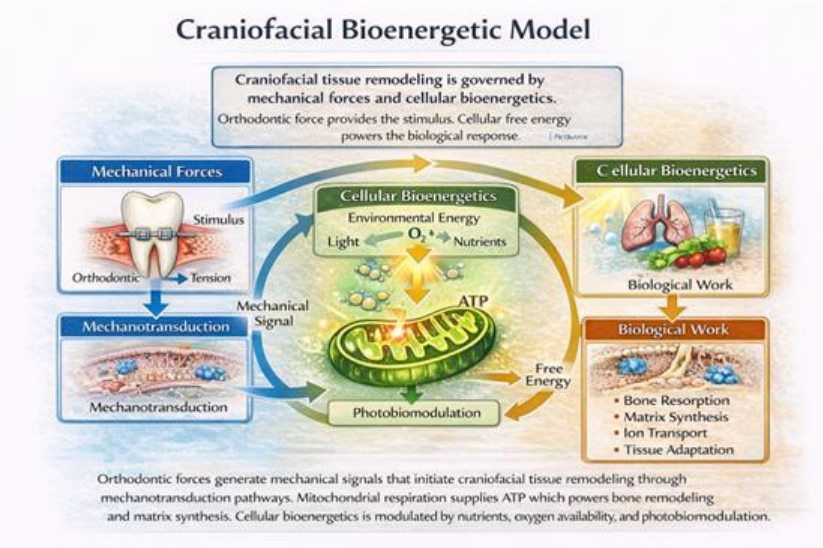


Figure 5

The Craniofacial Bioenergetic Model

Conceptual diagram illustrating the interaction between mechanobiology and cellular bioenergetics in craniofacial tissue remodeling. Mechanical forces applied to craniofacial structures initiate mechanotransduction pathways that regulate osteoclast-mediated bone resorption and osteoblast-mediated bone formation. Mitochondrial oxidative phosphorylation generates adenosine triphosphate (ATP), which provides cellular free energy required for biological work including extracellular matrix turnover and skeletal remodeling. Environmental energy inputs—including nutrients, oxygen availability, and photonic energy delivered through

photobiomodulation—support mitochondrial metabolism and influence the cellular bioenergetic environment. Together, these interacting systems form the Craniofacial Bioenergetic Model, in which mechanical signaling directs tissue adaptation while cellular bioenergetics powers the biological processes responsible for craniofacial remodeling.

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Author

James M. Bronson DDS, FBPI, FIAO

Affiliation

ALF Educational Institute, LLC

Corresponding Author

James M. Bronson DDS
ALF Educational Institute, LLC
Email: director @quantumalf.com
Phone: 1-703-856-7792

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