

OCD SESSION 3 COURSE WORKBOOK





This week in the session we talked about our fight/flight response. We talked about what causes the fight/flight response, and how it can even be helpful. We also talked about some of the symptoms of our fight/flight response and how sitting with these feelings can help us experience less of them over time. It's important to remind ourselves that these symptoms are not harmful and when they are triggered by our OCD threats, we won't be trying to get rid of them. This is because our fight/flight response will calm with time even when we do nothing. This is called habituation. It can be helpful however to realise that simple things like slowing our breath down or doing relaxation can help reduce our overall stress levels and return our bodies to a more relaxed state.

What is Fight/Flight?

Fight/flight is the automatic human response to fear. It's switched on when we're about to do something scary. For example, waiting in line for a rollercoaster can be very fear provoking. The psychological experience of fight/flight is feeling anxious, fearful or scared! These feelings are just a symptom of the body's Flight or Fight response. It's normal, and even quite helpful. When we perceive a threat, we need to be able to defend ourselves or get out of that situation quickly, the flight or fight response allows us to do that. For example, if we're crossing the road and suddenly, we see a bus, it's useful if we can get out of that situation quickly. Fight/flight helps us do that, by giving us a sudden burst of energy.

However, sometimes our fight/flight seems to come on at inappropriate times. Some people get anxious in supermarkets, some people get anxious around other people, and some people are scared of spiders or dogs or cats. For some people, their own thoughts can frighten them. Usually we fear things because we view them as a threat. Anxiety tends to depend on three things:

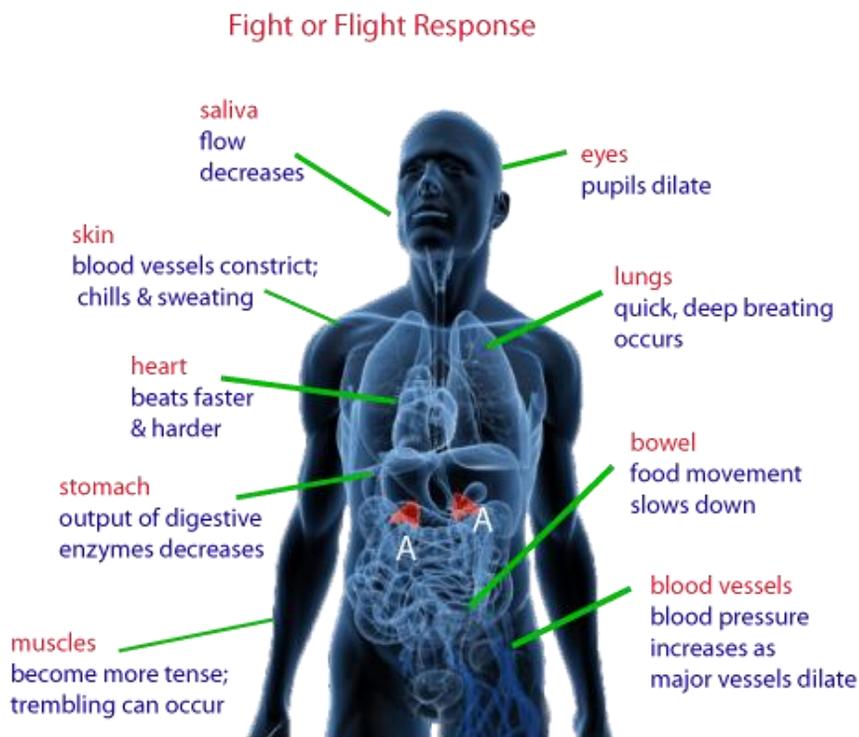
1. The extent you perceive an event/person/thing as a threat
2. Your normal response to threat and how often you experience it
3. Your sense of control over both the arousal and the threat

So, the way you view a situation/person/thing and your thoughts about it are what create the anxiety. Have a think about some of the things that make you anxious. Does this apply to your anxiety?

What happens to me when I'm anxious?

When you recognise something as dangerous or threatening your brain releases chemicals called 'neurotransmitters' which cause changes in the rest of your body. It used to be the case that these changes would help you escape or fight (e.g. pumping more blood to the muscles is helpful if you need to use them to run or fight). But since many of the things that make us anxious these days don't require us to run or fight, we experience uncomfortable physical symptoms instead. The flight or fight response activates the 'sympathetic nervous system' which prepares our body for danger by: increasing heartrate, dilating pupils, increasing breathing rate, dilates blood vessels to muscles, constricts other blood vessels, relaxes the bladder etc.

Unfortunately, since we don't usually run away or fight the things that make us anxious in the modern world, we experience these uncomfortable changes as symptoms of anxiety. This week in the session we talked about some of the most uncomfortable anxiety symptoms: hyperventilation and muscle tension.





Task 1: Anxiety Symptom Checklist

Read the checklist below. If you've experienced any of these symptoms when you're anxious, tick that box.

Symptom	Check	Symptom	Check
Heart racing		Over breathing	
Things becoming brighter		Nausea	
Dry mouth		Numbness	
Muscle tension/pain		Light-headedness	
Tremors/shaking arms/legs		Chills or hot flashes	
Gasping for air		Dizziness	
Sweating		Feeling that I am not real	
Headaches		Feeling the situation is not real	
Neck pain		Choking	
Butterflies in stomach		Muffled hearing	
Urinary urgency		Tunnel vision	

What can I do about anxiety?

Overcoming anxiety can be difficult, but it can be done! Part of overcoming anxiety is about examining your thoughts. Because the way we look at objects/people/things makes them seem like a threat, part of overcoming anxiety is about changing that perception. Another important part of challenging anxiety is taking a closer look at our behaviour. Sometimes the way we respond to situations/thing/people can actually reinforce our anxiety and make these things even scarier. We will come to talk more about how our behaviour and how our thoughts impact on anxiety in future classes.

This week in the session we tried out some relaxation exercises. The first was slow breathing. We also tried out progressive muscle relaxation (PMR). You can find PMR and slow-breathing audio tracks online at:

- <http://wellbeing-glasgow.org.uk/audio-resources/>
- <http://www.elament.org.uk/self-help-resources/mind-to-listen/>

