

The **fight or flight response** is an automatic physiological reaction to an event that is perceived as stressful or frightening.

The perception of threat activates the sympathetic nervous system and triggers an acute stress response that prepares the body to fight or flee. These responses are evolutionary adaptations to increase chances of survival in threatening situations. Overly frequent, intense, or inappropriate activation of the fight or flight response is implicated in a range of clinical conditions including most anxiety disorders.

A helpful part of treatment for anxiety is an improved understanding of the purpose and function of the fight or flight response. This information sheet describes the bodily consequences of the fight or flight response.

FIGHT OR FLIGHT RESPONSE

RESULTING SYMPTOMS

Mind and body set on high alert watching out for signs of danger.



Sense of danger, impending doom, Agitation - uneasiness - can't relax

Rapid breathing helps to divert blood to vital organs

Dizziness - Lightheadedness - Hyperventilation

'Tunnel Vision' - Peripheral vision is diminished so that sight is centrally focused (on any danger) Pupils of the eyes widen to let in more light.

Eye strain - Fear of going blind Blurred vision / spots in front of eyes - Sensitivity to light Feelings of unreality

Adrenaline increases heart rate sending blood to major muscle groups - to prepare for action.

Rapid heart beat - Palpitations - Flutters - Feeling of 'skipped' or 'missed' beats. Tight chest - Choking sensation

Increase in sweat so that the body does not overheat.

Sweating (even in cold) Hot and cold flushes

Stomach produces extra acid and digestive juices. Muscle action increases to quickly digest and eliminate food

Frequently needing toilet Nausea 'Butterflies' Churning stomach Acidity Indigestion - Diarrhoea

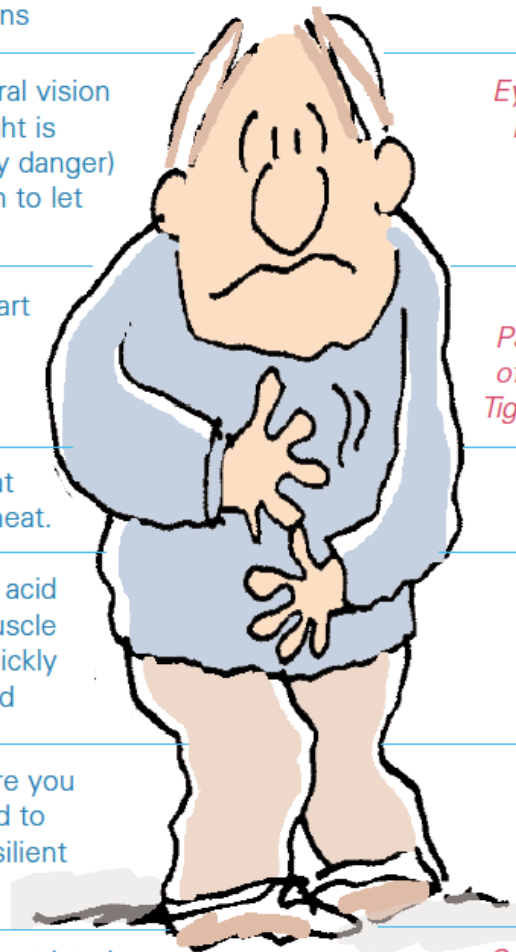
Muscles tense to prepare you for a quick departure and to make the body more resilient to attack.

Muscle tension - Shaking Stiffness Trembling - 'Jelly legs' - Twitching Even severe pain at times.

Blood vessels to skin constricted reducing any potential blood loss especially in hands and feet.



Cold clammy hands - 'Pins and needles' - Tingling sensations or numbness in hands and feet



Anyone who suffers from anxiety will benefit from a deeper understanding of the fight or flight response. For example, if you experience panic attacks or panic disorder you may misinterpret the bodily signs associated with fight or flight as signs of impending catastrophe and understanding the fight or flight response is therefore a helpful 'decatastrophizing' technique.

Similarly, those with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) may mistake the increased physiological arousal as an indicator that there is a genuine threat present. Therefore, understanding more about the fight or flight response can help you feel safer, and learn how to implement relaxation and grounding strategies.

