



About Stress

What is the Fight or Flight Response?

The fight or flight response is the body's automatic reaction to a perceived threat or challenge. Stress hormones such as adrenaline help prepare the body to respond quickly - for example by confronting a danger, moving away from it, freezing or becoming highly alert.

This response evolved to help us survive immediate danger. Today, the same system can also be activated by situations that feel threatening or demanding even when there is no physical danger.

Everyday triggers can include:

- ◆ Giving a big presentation
- ◆ Being stuck in traffic and running late
- ◆ Trying to meet a difficult deadline
- ◆ A challenging meeting with your manager
- ◆ Disagreements or office politics
- ◆ Worry about job security
- ◆ Constant change or uncertainty at work
- ◆ Financial or relationship problems

The brain and body can respond to perceived threats as well as immediate physical danger. Thoughts, memories and expectations can all influence how strongly the response is triggered. That does not mean the reaction is imagined - the physical changes are real.

How quickly the body settles afterwards varies from person to person and depends on the situation and individual. There is no single recovery time that applies to everyone.

An occasional stress response is normal. If it is activated very frequently or for long periods, the body may have less opportunity to recover, and ongoing stress can affect physical and mental health.



What happens in the body?

During the fight or flight response, the body temporarily shifts resources towards systems needed for immediate action. Heart rate and breathing may increase, muscles can tense and attention may become more focused. Digestion and other functions may slow while the body deals with the perceived threat.

These changes are usually temporary. When the threat passes and the nervous system settles, the body gradually returns towards its usual state.

Some changes you may notice

- ◆ Dry mouth
- ◆ Paler face or cold hands and feet
- ◆ Lump in the throat
- ◆ Nausea or “butterflies”
- ◆ Palpitations
- ◆ Muscle tension
- ◆ Increased alertness
- ◆ Faster or shallower breathing
- ◆ Sweating
- ◆ Goose bumps
- ◆ Urge to go to the toilet
- ◆ Feeling panicky or on edge
- ◆ Dilated pupils
- ◆ Changes in attention, hearing or perception

Helping the body settle

- ◆ Slow your breathing and allow the out-breath to lengthen.
- ◆ Pause before reacting if you can.
- ◆ Move around or release muscle tension.
- ◆ Give yourself time to recover after a demanding event.
- ◆ If stress responses are frequent, severe or affecting daily life, seek appropriate professional support.

Always consult your GP or another appropriate health professional if you are concerned about your health.