

Fight Or Flight Response

When faced with a life-threatening danger it often makes sense to run away or, if that is not possible, to fight. The *fight or flight* response is an *automatic* survival mechanism which prepares the body to take these actions. All of the body sensations produced are happening for good reasons – to prepare your body to run away or fight – but may be experienced as uncomfortable when you do not know why they are happening.

Thoughts racing

Quicker thinking helps us to evaluate danger and make rapid decisions. It can be very difficult to concentrate on anything apart from the danger (or escape routes) when the fight or flight response is active

Changes to vision

Vision can become acute so that more attention can be paid to danger. You might notice 'tunnel vision' or vision becoming 'sharper'

Dry mouth

The mouth is part of the digestive system. Digestion shuts down during dangerous situations as energy is diverted towards the muscles

Heart beats faster

A faster heart beat feeds more blood to the muscles and enhances your ability to run away or fight

Nausea and 'butterflies' in the stomach

Blood is diverted away from the digestive system which can lead to feelings of nausea or 'butterflies'

Hands get cold

Blood vessels in the skin contract to force blood towards major muscle groups

Muscles tense

Muscles all over the body tense in order to get you ready to run away or fight. Muscles may also shake or tremble, particularly if you stay still, as a way of staying 'ready for action'

If we don't exercise (e.g. run away or fight) to use up the extra oxygen then we can quickly start to feel dizzy or lightheaded

Dizzy or lightheaded

Breathing becomes quicker and shallower

Quicker breathing takes in more oxygen to power the muscles. This makes the body more able to fight or run away

Adrenal glands release adrenaline

The adrenaline quickly signals other parts of the body to get ready to respond to danger

Bladder urgency

Muscles in the bladder sometimes relax in response to extreme stress

Palms become sweaty

When in danger the body sweats to keep cool. A cool machine is an efficient machine, so sweating makes the body more likely to survive a dangerous event