The Fight-or-Flight Response

Fact Sheet

➤ What is the fight-or-flight response?

The **fight-or-flight response** is one of the tools your body uses to protect you from danger. When you feel threatened, the flight-or-flight response is automatically triggered, and several physiological changes prepare you to either confront or flee from the threat.

➤ What are the symptoms of fight-or-flight?

- Increased heart rate
- Dizziness or lightheadedness
- Shaking
- Racing thoughts
- Nausea / “butterflies” in stomach
- Sweating
- Difficulty concentrating
- Rapid, shallow breathing
- Tensed muscles

➤ How is the fight-or-flight response triggered?

Even threats to emotional well-being, such as the fear of embarrassment before giving a presentation, can trigger the fight-or-flight response. In these cases, the symptoms often do more harm than good. An increased heart rate and sweating might help you escape from a bear, but they won’t do much to help you look cool and collected during a presentation.

➤ Is the fight-or-flight response bad?

Everyone will experience the fight-or-flight response at times, to varying degrees. Usually, it’s natural, healthy, and not a problem. However, when the fight-or-flight response leads to excessive anger, anxiety, prolonged stress, or other problems, it might be time to intervene.

➤ How can I manage the fight-or-flight response?

In addition to the fight-or-flight response, your body can also initiate an opposing **relaxation response**. Many symptoms of the relaxation response counteract fight-or-flight, such as slower and deeper breathing, relaxed muscles, and a slower heart rate. The relaxation response can be triggered by using relaxation skills, such as deep breathing or progressive muscle relaxation.

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