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THE FIGHT OR FLIGHT RESPONSE

The fight or flight response, or stress response, is triggered by a release of hormones either prompting us to *stay and fight* or *run away and escape*. So the 'fight' could be getting angry and shouting and the 'flight' could be storming out of a room without saying anything. These types of response are your body's reaction to danger and were created during evolution to help you survive real situations that are stressful and life-threatening.

In today's world, your body still has the fight or flight response but the 'dangers' that trigger it are frequently not life-threatening situations. They can be caused merely by thinking negatively about something, such as:

- ✗ Giving a big presentation
- ✗ Being stuck in traffic, late for work or a meeting
- ✗ Trying to meet a deadline at work / working overtime
- ✗ A meeting with the boss
- ✗ Disagreements at work/office politics
- ✗ Worry about losing your job
- ✗ Constant changes at work/being asked to do things you can't or don't want to do
- ✗ Financial or relationship problems

All these examples of commonplace situations that you could find yourself in are not truly dangerous, however, you will still send a 'danger' message to the brain with your negative 'oh no' thoughts ... but it's a false message! Your stress response is triggered and your body reacts as if it was dangerous or life-threatening because the brain does NOT differentiate between real and perceived threats. This response is there to save your life and the brain will not take a risk, so it launches the stress response every time ... just in case!

The stress response can be triggered in a single instant, but how quickly you calm down and return to your natural state is going to vary from person to person (and depending on what caused it). Typically it takes 20 to 30 minutes for your body to calm down and return to normal.

That's OK if this response is a one-off or just an occasional occurrence; your body has time to recover and return to its normal state. However, if you repeatedly trigger the stress response with on-going problems and negative thoughts, your body has very little chance to recover. Living in a prolonged state of high alert and stress (when there isn't any real reason for it) can mark the start of chronic stress and be detrimental to your physical as well as your mental health.

Always consult your GP if you are concerned about your health

During the fight or flight response your body is trying to prioritise what it needs to do that will save your life, so anything it doesn't need to maintain for your immediate survival is stopped. This means that the digestive and reproductive systems, tissue repair, the immune system and several other non-essential functions are all temporarily halted. Instead, your body prioritises all its energy on the most crucial functions.

This is why, when these otherwise essential functions and systems are shut down repeatedly, chronic, long-term stress is triggered and can lead to ill health.

These are just some of the sensations you may experience or notice during the stress response:

- ◆ Dry mouth
- ◆ Colour drains from your face
- ◆ Lump in the throat
- ◆ Nausea
- ◆ Goose bumps
- ◆ Palpitations
- ◆ Feeling cold in fingers and feet
- ◆ Mental alertness increases
- ◆ Hyperventilating
- ◆ Muscle tension e.g. in shoulders and thighs
- ◆ Sweating
- ◆ Butterflies in the stomach
- ◆ Urge to go to the toilet
- ◆ Feeling of panic
- ◆ Reduced perception of pain
- ◆ Pupils dilate, peripheral vision is heightened.
- ◆ Hearing becomes sharper

These free downloads may provide further help:

The 60 Second Tranquiliser: Learn how to calm yourself when feeling stressed

How to Identify Stress: Review your own physical, emotional, psychological and behavioural signs of stress.

If you would like advice from one of ISMAUK's Stress Management Consultants, who can help you on positive approaches to managing your stress, please go to '[Find a Consultant.](#)'

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