Fight or Flight Response

When a stressful stimulus occurs, the acute stress response, also known as *Fight* or *Flight*, is triggered.

The fight or flight response is controlled by a part of the nervous system called the autonomic nervous system which regulates the unconscious processes that your body performs like digestion, heart rate, breathing rate, urination, as well as others.[1]

When the fight or flight response is triggered:[2][3]

Heart rate increases

Breathing rate increases

Less blood flows to the face, hands, and feet

Digestion is slowed

Blood sugar levels increase

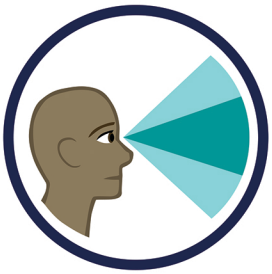
More blood flows to the brain, arms and legs

Tear and saliva production is stopped

Bladder muscles relax (feels like you have to pee)

Pain tolerance increases

Pupils dilate



Vision narrows

Immune system functions decrease

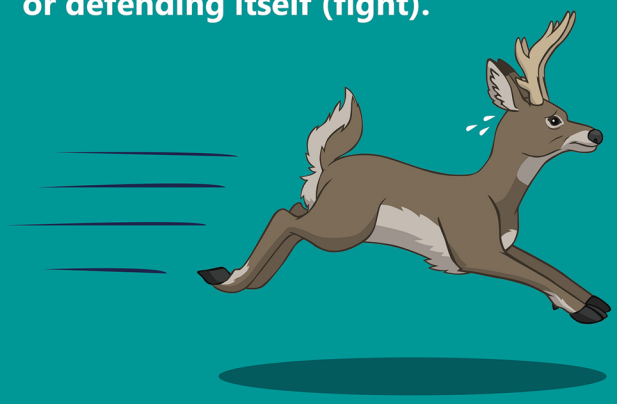
Prepare for Intense Movement

Heightened Awareness and Senses

Conservation of Energy

Fight or Flight

These changes occur to prepare your body for running away from the threat (flight) or defending itself (fight).



Flight

Fight

In addition to fight and flight, there is also freeze! When some prey animals encounter a stressful stimulus, instead of preparing to fight or run away, they decide to stay absolutely still and freeze. Scientists think this happens because the animal's brain has determined that fighting or running away won't work. Instead, they may hold still or even play dead in hopes that the stressful stimulus will pass.[4]

Freeze

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1. Adapted from: Schmidt, A; Thews, G (1989). "Autonomic Nervous System". In Janig, W (ed.). Human Physiology (2 ed.). New York, NY: Springer-Verlag. pp. 333–370.
2. Adapted from: Cleveland Clinic. (2020, February 26). What Happens to Your Body During the Fight or Flight Response? Retrieved August 26, 2020, from https://health.clevelandclinic.org/what-happens-to-your-body-during-the-fight-or-flight-response/
3. Adapted from: Henry Gleitman, Alan J. Fridlund and Daniel Reisberg (2004). Psychology (6 ed.). W. W. Norton & Company. ISBN 978-0-393-97767-7.
4. Adapted from: Schmidt, N. B., Richey, J. A., Zvolensky, M. J., & Maner, J. K. (2008, September). Exploring human freeze responses to a threat stressor. Retrieved August 26, 2020, from https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2489204/