
Our fight or flight response



Do you frequently have a sense of foreboding?

Do you find yourself catastrophising many situations? Such as thinking every health symptom is a tumor? or that something bad will happen to you? When we are stressed our brain makes a story to make sense of itself and sometimes the default story becomes 'something bad is going to happen to me'...

When this happens our fight or flight response is a physiological reaction in response to a perceived threat to our very survival. This response can be activated by many events including our feelings of being overwhelmed, irritated, frustrated, anxious or constantly ruminating about negative thoughts. In this fight or flight state, we may feel tense or alert (to fight off the threat or flee from the scene), and our sympathetic nervous system will send out acute impulses to pump stress hormones like adrenaline and noradrenaline into our bloodstream which cause an increase in heart rate and blood pressure, sweating, and muscle tensing. We might have intense focus (causing difficulty sleeping and zapping energy) or trouble focusing on unrelated small tasks. At the same time, our 'non-essential' organs like digestion are slowed as they are not important for survival in an acute threat situation.

Stress triggers a cascade of events resulting in the adrenal glands becoming overworked and, potentially exhausted over time. The initial adrenalin rush is one we all recognise and occurs to alert us to imminent danger. This is useful when we need to perform, such as for a work presentation or reacting to an emergency to provide energy, strength and focus, but it should be short lived. When stress becomes chronic, it results in continually elevated adrenalin and cortisol. These hormones raid our stores of nutrients leaving us feeling wired and or exhausted and may lead to frustrating symptoms such as poor sleep, weight gain and poor immune function. It is important to acknowledge that it is happening, remind yourself you are stressed, try some breathing/mindfulness techniques that help to get you out of your head and into your body.

Above all, if these feelings are consuming or you struggle to resolve them with simple strategies please seek professional assistance. Naturopaths have pretty hefty 'tool-bag' of strategies, remedies and referral options that can provide great assistance.