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Understanding & Overcoming Fear of Public Speaking.

The Fight or Flight Response - What is Happening to Me?

The fight or flight response is an ancient survival mechanism for any physical manifestations of anxiety you experience. Regardless of their intensity - from mild to extreme - all are 'normal' reactions to either real or perceived danger.

The Fight or Flight Response Explained

When our ancestors lived in caves, their existence was totally dependent on how well they responded to danger. Those methods for recognition and response to threat were 'hot-wired' into their systems. The fight or flight response is automatic and by-passes the rational or conscious mind. We do NOT consciously choose to feel threatened or suffer anxiety. It is an instinctive response, happening unconsciously, of its own accord.

What happens at a physiological level is that once the response is stimulated, a part of the brain called the hypothalamus sets off a series of actions preparing the body for either battle (facing the danger) or running (escaping the threat).

Chemicals such as adrenalin, noradrenalin and cortisol are released into the bloodstream and complex patterns of nerve cell firing occur. Our body is on high alert. Our breathing and heart rate quickens. Our muscles tighten. Our body's entire focus becomes repelling the threat.

Our body's non-essential functions are slowed down as the energy keeping them in top functioning condition is temporarily refocused elsewhere. Because you don't usually stop to make a speech while fighting or running for your life, the systems governing voice are affected. The degree to which we feel challenged directly corresponds to the loss of functioning we experience. The symptoms range from mild to severe accordingly.

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What is important to remember about our fight or flight response, is that it is NOT a rational reaction. It works regardless of the type of threat. In other words, it is activated whether the threat is only in our minds or is real.

Sometimes it works **positively** allowing ordinary people to become heroes. For example the massive surge of adrenalin and allied stress hormones will enable a mother to lift a car off her injured and trapped child or the fireman to rescue people from a blazing building. Once the danger is passed the body returns to normal.

Or the fight or flight response can work **negatively** and against us. In these instances we perceive challenges in our everyday life as threats and react accordingly. Constantly living in a state of heightened anxiety or fear causes significant emotional, mental and physical health problems.

If this is you, the suggestions here will be a good starting point.

Use these tips for overcoming performance anxiety or fear of public speaking to remove the need to battle the fight or flight syndrome head on.

So read through these tips and then put them to work. Soon you'll be on your way towards being a stress-free speaker and that will feel a whole lot better than being the victim of fear.

Harness the butterflies by getting the adrenalin flowing in your body working for you by planning. This way you will have those nerves under control and contained.

Get ALL the Facts

- * know precisely when you are required to be there
- * find out how long you are expected to speak for
- * get an estimate who the audience are likely to be (male, female, mixed audience, old, young, mixed)
- * Make sure you WRITE IT ALL DOWN and put somewhere you know you'll not lose it.

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Plan & Prepare

Planning and preparation are essential if you are going to conquer your fear! When you are you have no need to feel afraid and the unpleasant symptoms of fear or anxiety disappear. Good planning and preparation will give you peace of mind.

The terms, planning and preparation, cover many areas. Some are essential. Others you may or may not need depending on your personal situation.

Remember the essentials:

- *Researching, writing & rehearsing your speech out loud.**
- *Planning the use of props of any sort: music, art, photographs, objects and Power Point.**
- *Preparing yourself: grooming, appropriate choice of clothing.**