



Being Afraid

Have you ever been afraid? Everyone gets scared sometimes. Do thunder and lightning make your heart beat faster? Maybe your mouth goes dry when your teacher announces a pop quiz, or your palms sweat when it's your turn to give your report in front of the class. Perhaps you get butterflies in your stomach when you see the bully that picks on you.

Everyday Worries

We all have fears from time to time. That's true no matter how big we are or brave we can be. Fear can even be good for you sometimes and even help you stay healthy. Fear of getting too close to a campfire may save you from a bad burn. And fear of getting a bad grade on a test may make you study more.

Being a bit on edge can also sharpen your senses and help you perform better in a recital or during a track meet. Some people even enjoy being a little scared. That's why they like to watch scary movies - or go on roller-coaster rides.

What Happens When You're Scared?

Have you ever wondered why being scared makes your heart beat faster and makes you breathe quicker? The body's reaction to fear is called the "fight or flight" response. And people have had it since the beginning of time.

Here's how it works. Imagine you're a caveman or cavewoman alive 100,000 years ago - and you come face to face with a hungry saber-toothed tiger. You have two choices: 1) Run for it (that's flight), or 2) pick up your club and battle with the tiger (that's fight). A final choice (be eaten) doesn't seem like such a good one!

Today, you can apply fight or flight to that bully who confronts you and won't listen to reason. You have two choices: 1) Turn and walk away (flight), or 2) fight, even though you know fighting won't solve the problem.

To prepare for fight or flight, your body does a number of things automatically so it's ready for quick action or a quick escape. Your heart rate increases to pump more blood to your muscles and brain. Your lungs take in air faster to supply your body with oxygen. The pupils in your eyes get larger to see better. And your digestive and urinary systems slow down for the moment so you can concentrate on more important things.

What Is Anxiety?

Usually, our bodies go into fight or flight only when there is something to fear. However, sometimes this occurs when there doesn't seem to be anything to be frightened about. When you feel scared but there doesn't seem to be a clear reason, that's called **anxiety** (say: ang-**zye**-uh-tee).

There might be other feelings that come along with anxiety - like a feeling of tightness in your chest, a bellyache, dizziness, or a sense that something horrible is going to happen. These