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## **Physiology of a Panic Attack: Fight or Flight Anxiety**

Many people who first experience a panic attack don't know what is happening to them. Moreover, people who experience a panic attack or panic attacks find it reassuring to know is happening to them.

I know how scary it can be, first hand. When I described my symptoms to my doctor, after having my first panic attack, he didn't provide any help or tell me anything other than that he was recommending I see a psychologist.

While the referral was a good recommendation, it was hard not knowing anything about what was happening to me. Knowing something about the process would have put me somewhat at ease. I initially felt like I was going crazy.

Now in fairness, most medical doctors, at least general practitioners, are not trained in mental health issues, at least in any real depth, and are not prepared to provide any type of counseling; and their training is in only a biological model. Furthermore most healthcare systems require physicians to work within many time constraints.

Obviously this does not help the panic attack sufferer.

Fortunately, though, awareness of panic attacks is increasing, and now, when patients experience an attack, more family doctors will tell them so.

Once a physical exam is completed by a medical doctor which rules out any physical causes, then a diagnosis can be made. Medical doctors, psychologists or psychiatrists can make a diagnosis of panic attacks or disorder.

But let's look more at the process.

### **Fight or Flight Anxiety**

During a panic attack what is known as the "fight or flight response" is activated, even though the individual is not any real danger.

The "fight or flight response" activates the body's mental and physical survival responses which are to "fight" or "flee" from perceived attack, harm or threat.

When this response is initiated chemicals such as adrenaline, noradrenaline and cortisol are released into our bloodstream which causes a series of physiological effects. Our

heart rate increases, our pupils dilate, and our respiration increases. Blood flow to the brain is reduced which means that our rational thinking is compromised.

This in turn causes our thoughts to race and we are on a heightened alert. We are hypersensitive to things that normally wouldn't bother us.

The whole process is a cyclical because our racing thoughts and worries increase our physiological symptoms and in turn our physiological symptoms increase our racing thoughts and worries.

While many people suffering a panic attack feel that they are either having a heart attack or going crazy, it can be reassuring to know that this is not the case.

Of course if you've experienced a panic attack you are probably concerned about experiencing another. Please be reassured that if you've been diagnosed with panic attacks you are not losing your mind or having a heart attack.

You now understand the physiology process of a panic attack, in particular the fight or flight process and how anxiety and panic attacks result from this process. However, the great news is that you can actually use this information to your advantage and gain control of your anxiety. If you join my free newsletter, I'll discuss exactly how to do so.

For more information about panic attacks, agoraphobia, and anxiety, please sign up for our free newsletter by simply visiting [www.PanicAttackRecovery.com](http://www.PanicAttackRecovery.com) and providing your email address in the sign-up box. Subscribers can opt out of our newsletter at any time.

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