Fight, flight and freeze

What your body is doing when the alarm goes off, and why.

When your brain senses danger, it prepares your body to fight, to run or to freeze. This happens in a fraction of a second, before the thinking part of your brain has had a look. It is the same response whether the threat is a dog off its lead or a presentation on Monday.

Every sensation has a job. None of them is harmful.

What you notice	What your body is doing	Why
Racing or pounding heart	Pumping blood faster to the big muscles	More fuel for running or fighting
Fast, shallow breathing	Taking in extra oxygen	Ready for a burst of effort
Dizzy or light-headed	A side effect of breathing faster than you need to	Harmless, and it settles as breathing slows
Tight or shaky muscles	Muscles tensed and ready to move	Faster reactions
Sweating	Cooling the body down	Stops you overheating
Churning stomach, dry mouth	Digestion switched off for now	Energy goes where it is needed
Tunnel vision, racing thoughts	Attention narrows on to the threat	Nothing else matters in an emergency
Cold or tingling hands and feet	Blood moves from skin to muscles	Protects against blood loss
Frozen, blank or numb	The freeze response	Staying still and unnoticed can be safest

After the alarm

Once the threat has passed, a second system (the "rest and digest" system) brings everything back down. This always happens. The body cannot stay at full alarm for long.

Afterwards you may feel shaky, washed out or tearful for a while. That is the adrenaline clearing. It does not mean something is wrong.

> **Try this**
> Next time you notice a sensation, name what it is for: "That is my heart getting blood to my legs." Many people find this makes the sensation less frightening.

My notes and questions

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