

# How to Prevent Your Survival Mechanism from Backfiring

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Our bodies are wonderful organisms. We are specially designed to recognize threats in our environments and prepare ourselves to eliminate the threat either by running away from it or by attacking it. This is what is commonly known as the Fight or Flight response. This response is a finely tuned survival mechanism that increases the odds that we will live to fight (or flee) another day. If this mechanism is for our good, how does it backfire on us?

Let's look at a day in the life of James. He wakes up late, having slept through his alarm. In his rush to get to an important meeting on time, he gets pulled over and receives a speeding ticket. He shows up late to the meeting and his boss had to pinch hit for him on an important presentation. After the meeting, his boss asks him to see him at his office before he goes home that day. James tries to take a moment over lunch to decompress from his frustrating morning only to realize that he was supposed to have dialed in to a vital call with a client at 11am.

You may have experienced some days like this. We call this stress. Although you may not have realized this before, stress triggers our Fight or Flight response. James' day was filled with threats, maybe not threats to his life or his physical integrity, but threats to his work quality, identity in the workplace, and possibly even his job security. Although most of us would agree that none of these are as important as threats to our immediate survival, our body doesn't know the difference. It responds to all threats the same way. Add to that the fact that in James' (and often our) work environment, the threats don't come and go on an individual basis. They may pile on all at once before you have a chance to dig out. Some threats you may be able to deal with quickly, but others may linger for weeks.

The Fight or Flight response was designed to help us in the short term, but if it's constantly being triggered in our environment, it can actually cause chronic problems for us. Below is just a sampling of the issues unchecked stress can cause.

- **Health problems:** Stress is related to weight gain, poor sleep, and chronic illness. In extreme cases, our survival mechanism can quite literally contribute to our death.

- **Relationship strain:** It only makes sense that if our body is in the Fight and Flight response that we would follow suit in how we manage relationships when we're under stress. You might find that you are just too stressed to deal with another conflict or your emotional volcano erupts for trivial reasons.
- **Emotional issues:** Chronic stress has been found to contribute to psychological symptoms, notably anxiety and depression. These emotional symptoms can only serve to worsen the stress if not dealt with proactively.
- **Declining work performance:** When we're under chronic stress, we tend not to think clearly or use sound judgment. People who find themselves in a constant reactive mode tend to underperform and make mistakes, which increases the stress and creates a vicious cycle.

To be at our healthiest and most productive, it is vital that we learn to manage the stress in our lives. To learn more about how to do this proactively please download our [free eBook](#) called "[The Fight or Flight Response](#)." Tell us what you think on our [Twitter](#) or [Facebook](#) page, and feel free to share this post.

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