

How can we minimise the effects of performance anxiety?

Do you fully understand the meaning of the term 'performance anxiety'?

It can be referred to as stage fright, nerves, bottle...etc. In real terms for performers such as ourselves it is an **inner fear of failure**.

This fear can be so incapacitating at times that even a seasoned performer will (if left to suffer) experience the same basic symptoms as a performance debutant.

Performance anxiety is not a sign of weakness or inadequacy!

Realization and acceptance that this phenomenon is our constant companion is the first positive step in the understanding and control of this duplicitous partner, 'debilitating monster or sensory heightening aid'.

What it is.

Performance anxiety is the physical manifestation of the phenomenon known as 'fight or flight'.

The fight or flight (ForF) reaction is the primitive response to a physical or psychological threat.

It is controlled by the ANS or autonomic nervous system which triggers parts of the body to deal with any imminent threat.

This basic, primitive response helped to ensure the survival of our species that faced many physical threats such as predatory animals etc.

This reaction triggers a state of physical vitality and strength, '**a sensory heightening aid**' or if left to reek havoc, '**a debilitating monster**'.

Several adaptive physical responses occur as ForF kicks in.

- Blood is moved from the extremities (limbs etc) to the body core. (We lose blood from facial areas and fingers)
- There is an interruption to the digestive process etc.
- Small muscle groups are deactivated in favour of larger ones.
- With this the heart rate increases.....pushing more adrenaline around the body.
- Breathing becomes shallow and often erratic.
- Focus or concentration becomes difficult.
- Dryness of the mouth, shaking or quivering of limbs, increased toiletry function.

These symptoms plus many others are all normal, spot any familiar ones?

It is a fine line between the exhilaration and anticipation experienced by some and the fear and panic suffered by so many.

The often-expressed view of 'just get used to it' or 'the more you do it the easier it becomes' are only true if performances are successful (remember, practice makes permanent...only proper practice makes perfect, so the same applies to performance). For many, coping or management mechanisms need to be in place to deal with the possibility of our constant companion....performance anxiety.