



By Emily Rogers

My guess is that most agility athletes get adrenaline rushes when they do agility. Do only can some handlers make the effects of the adrenaline work for them while so many other handlers fall victim to it? It is easy to see the focus and control of top handlers and the panic, what I call "fear or flee" handling, in so many others. I see so many perfectly capable handlers running with trained dogs who are unable to meet their goals because they can't keep their wits about them. Freaky handling is never pretty and rarely ends well. When the effects of adrenaline get out of hand, everything and anything can and will go wrong.

Ask Yourself

Does your adrenaline rush help you succeed in agility?

When you step to the line are you able to channel that rapid heartbeat and excitement into pure focus? Are you able to keep your wits about you and execute your well-designed plan? Do you feel in control of your body and actions while you are running a comparison in class or a course at a trial? Can you keep your composure when things are not going according to plan?

or

Does your adrenaline rush cause you to falter?

When you step to the line does that rapid heartbeat rattle you and cause you to doubt yourself? When you are on course does your brain have trouble keeping up with your dog? Does panic cause your mind to go blank? Or do you choke because everything you ever learned about

handling is pouring into your head all at once, making it impossible for you to react as you want to?

If your adrenaline rush facilitates you getting into "the zone," you are probably reaping your agility goals and probably enjoying the sport a lot more than those who are being traumatized by the effects of adrenaline and nerves. This zone isn't greasing you at the start line, recognizing what adrenaline rushes do to your body can give you critical insights to help you better your performance.

The Bad Stuff

Some unwanted effects you might have experienced during an adrenaline rush:

- You are not in control of your body—arms fall, feet get stuck in places, legs rotate late, and your voice goes up and up in both volume and pitch.
- You are not in control of your brain—you end up in the wrong place, on the wrong side of something (dog, obstacle, path), or at the wrong obstacle entirely. You begin the "that thing handling" the dreaded "make it up as you go and hope for the best" strategy.
- You can't react appropriately when something isn't going right. You or the dog think dropped hair makes a big error that either could have been "solved" or no longer matters. But you can't discuss what no longer matters and keep up your handling, and you can't fight to save what could have been saved. The brain won't react, the body has no hope.