

# Managing anger reduces stress levels, improves well-being

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WE have all faced stressful situations that make us frustrated and angry. Anger is a natural reaction to such situations. However, we need to learn how to control or manage it, if it is not to increase our stress levels and blood pressure.



Anger can be a healthy emotional response that motivates us to deal with the situations that provoke it. However, if we frequently lose our temper it can become a problem that adversely affects our physical and mental health.

We read all too often in our newspapers of people who in a fit of anger end up murdering the person they are angry with. The end result is many years in prison, not a happy outcome for anyone.

We read too of parents who lashing out at their children in anger end up doing them serious physical harm or even killing them.

These are extreme cases but happen all too often. Not all those who find themselves perpetually unable to control their anger will do themselves or others obvious physical harm but chronic anger can affect your decision-making, damage your relationships and negatively affect your mental and physical health.

It seldom changes the situation and tends to work against the happiness and peace of mind we would all like to enjoy.

## Causes

Many factors can contribute to chronic anger. These include previous experiences of trauma or abuse, stress, underlying mental or physical health problems and intoxication with liquor. Hereditary and environmental factors may also play a part.

If untreated or unresolved, excessive anger can itself result in negative coping strategies such as alcohol or drug dependencies.

## Understanding anger

Anger is a natural response to perceived threats. It only becomes a problem when you fail to manage it in a healthy way. If you find yourself becoming increasingly irritable, you may

benefit from learning skills to manage your anger.

Anger involves different elements, including your emotions and feelings such as sadness, disappointment or frustration.

Your body also reacts to anger. Common physical signs include muscle tension, increased heart rate and increased blood pressure as your body releases adrenaline.

Your thinking is affected too. How you think can cause or worsen anger or help you cope with it in a healthy way. For example, your anger may be fuelled by thoughts that everyone is against you or that your partner never does what you ask.

A healthy response would be to acknowledge that it is fine and normal to be frustrated but look for solutions instead of focusing only on what is wrong.

Some people react angrily to certain situations such as losing a parking space, while others take it as a normal part of life, which is a healthier approach.

You may have built up years of feeling unheard, ignored, sad, frustrated or disrespected. This can cause your frustrations to fester and make you miserable or build up until you explode in an angry outburst.

At one time or another, most of us have had the experience of exploding in anger at a seemingly small thing such as getting cut off in traffic or being made to wait in line. Many little annoyances may build up into a mighty anger.

There are times you may feel overwhelmed and respond inappropriately. When this becomes a pattern it is likely to have an impact on your quality of life and relationships. It is important that your responses, both feelings and behaviour, match the situation.

How you perceive, interpret and then respond to situations is an indication of how emotionally healthy you are.

### Managing anger

A healthy emotional response when angry is to appropriately adjust your response to each unique situation.

It involves being in touch with your thoughts and feelings and in control of your behaviour so that your feelings are in line with the situation.

If you over-react or disconnect from those who have angered you, you are likely to create situations that cause distress and are unproductive.

You have to be able to adapt. This means being emotionally flexible, able to access a wide range of emotions, knowing what emotion is appropriate and knowing when and how to control emotional intensity. Healthy emotional responses are key to everyday wellness.

Learn to think before you speak. It is easy to say in anger something you may later regret. Wait until you are calm to express your frustration in a manner that is assertive but not confrontational. Try to state your concerns without hurting others. This is the healthiest approach to handling anger.

Learning to manage stressful situations is likely to reduce the occasions of anger. Having a sense of proportion is part of dealing with stress, so you do not become angry over small issues.

Going for a brisk walk or some other physical activity can give you time to calm down and help reduce the stress you have been feeling.

Take short breaks during periods that tend to be stressful. Instead of focusing on what is making you angry, try to work on resolving the issue at hand, while being realistic about situations you cannot change.

Be quick to forgive. If you allow your anger to dominate your feelings you may end up bitter and unhappy.

Should such efforts fail to curtail extreme anger you may need to obtain counselling or to take an anger management class.

When to look for help

If your anger regularly causes you to do things you regret, hurts those around you or is taking a toll on your personal relationships, you are likely to benefit from either counselling or an anger management course.

If you have run-ins with the police, physically harm someone, know that people are afraid of your reactions or try to intimidate someone with your anger, you definitely need help controlling your anger. In this case you will need an anger management class, counselling or both.

Working with a counsellor to manage anger can improve your mental health and bring a sense of calm into your life.

Professional counselling can help address deep-rooted issues that may be causing disproportionate anger or rage in response to anger triggers.

It can be beneficial if you feel you have little control over your temper and find that your anger is negatively affecting the quality of your life.

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