

Anger management: Your questions answered

Anger isn't always bad, but it must be handled appropriately. Consider the purpose anger serves and the best approach to anger management.

Anger itself isn't a problem — it's how you handle it. Consider the nature of anger, as well as how to manage anger and what to do when you're confronted by someone whose anger is out of control.

What is anger?

Anger is a natural response to perceived threats. It causes your body to release adrenaline, your muscles to tighten, and your heart rate and blood pressure to increase. Your senses might feel more acute and your face and hands flushed.

However, anger becomes a problem only when you don't manage it in a healthy way.

So it's not 'bad' to feel angry?

Being angry isn't always a bad thing. Being angry can help you share your concerns. It can prevent others from walking all over you. It can motivate you to do something positive. The key is managing your anger in a healthy way.

What causes people to get angry?

There are many common triggers for anger, such as losing your patience, feeling as if your opinion or efforts aren't appreciated, and injustice. Other causes of anger include memories of traumatic or enraging events and worrying about personal problems.

You also have unique anger triggers, based on what you were taught to expect from yourself, others and the world around you. Your personal history feeds your reactions to anger, too. For example, if you weren't taught how to express anger appropriately, your frustrations might simmer and make you miserable, or build up until you explode in an angry outburst.

Inherited tendencies, brain chemistry or underlying medical conditions also play a role in your tendency toward angry outburst.

What's the best way to handle anger?

When you're angry, you can deal with your feelings through:

- **Expression.** This is the act of conveying your anger. Expression ranges from a reasonable, rational discussion to a violent outburst.
- **Suppression.** This is an attempt to hold in your anger and possibly convert it into more constructive behaviour. Suppressing anger, however, can cause you to turn your anger inward on yourself or express your anger through passive-aggressive behaviour.
- **Calming down.** This is when you control your outward behaviour and your internal responses by calming yourself and letting your feelings subside.

Ideally, you'll choose constructive expression — stating your concerns and needs clearly and directly, without hurting others or trying to control them.

Can anger harm your health?

Some research suggests that inappropriately expressing anger — such as keeping anger pent up — can be harmful to your health. Suppressing anger appears to make chronic pain worse, while expressing anger reduces pain.

There's also evidence that anger and hostility is linked with heart disease, high blood pressure, peptic ulcers and stroke.

When is professional help needed?

Learning to control anger is a challenge for everyone at times. Consider seeking help for anger issues if your anger seems out of control, causes you to do things you regret, hurts those around you or is taking a toll on your personal relationships.