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## Anger - how it affects people

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### Summary

- The long-term physical effects of uncontrolled anger include increased anxiety, high blood pressure and headache.
  - Anger can be a positive and useful emotion, if it is expressed appropriately.
  - Long-term strategies for anger management include regular exercise, learning relaxation techniques and counselling.
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Well-managed anger can be a useful emotion that motivates you to make positive changes. On the other hand, anger is a powerful emotion and if it isn't handled appropriately, it may have destructive results for you and those closest to you. Uncontrolled anger can lead to arguments, physical fights, physical abuse, assault and self-harm.

### Physical effects of anger

Anger triggers the body's 'fight or flight' response. Other emotions that trigger this response include fear, excitement and anxiety. The adrenal glands flood the body with stress hormones, such as adrenaline and cortisol. The brain shunts blood away from the gut and towards the muscles, in preparation for physical exertion. Heart rate, blood pressure and respiration increase, the body temperature rises and the skin perspires. The mind is sharpened and focused.

### Health problems with anger

The constant flood of stress chemicals and associated metabolic changes that go with ongoing unmanaged anger can eventually cause harm to many different systems of the body.

Some of the short and long-term health problems that have been linked to unmanaged anger include:

- headache
- digestion problems, such as abdominal pain
- insomnia
- increased anxiety
- depression
- high blood pressure
- skin problems, such as eczema
- heart attack
- stroke.

### Expressing anger in healthy ways

Suggestions on how to express your anger in healthy ways include:

- If you feel out of control, walk away from the situation temporarily, until you cool down.
  - Recognise and accept the emotion as normal and part of life.
  - Try to pinpoint the exact reasons why you feel angry.
  - Once you have identified the problem, consider coming up with different strategies for how to remedy the situation.
  - Do something physical, such as going for a run or playing sport.
  - Talk to someone you trust about how you're feeling.
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## Unhelpful ways to deal with anger

Many people express their anger in inappropriate and harmful ways, including:

- **anger explosions** – some people have very little control over their anger and tend to explode in rages. Raging anger may lead to physical abuse or violence. A person who doesn't control their temper can isolate themselves from family and friends. Some people who fly into rages have low self-esteem, and use their anger as a way to manipulate others and feel powerful. For more information, see '[What is domestic violence](#)' on the White Ribbon Australia website
- **anger repression** – some people consider that anger is an inappropriate or 'bad' emotion and choose to suppress it. However, bottled anger often turns into depression and anxiety. Some people vent their bottled anger at innocent parties, such as children or pets.

## Dealing with arguments

When you have had an argument, it is easy to stay angry or upset with the other person. If you don't resolve an argument with a person you see often, it can be a very uncomfortable experience.

Talking to the person about your disagreement may or may not help. If you do approach them, make sure it is in a helpful way. Stay calm and communicate openly and honestly.

If the person could be violent or abusive, it may be best not to approach them directly. You could talk to them over the phone to see if they are open to finding a solution to the argument, if you feel safe to do so. It might be helpful to ask someone to be there with you, to give you support when you make the call and afterwards.

Try and tell the person how you feel as a result of their opinion, but avoid trying to tell them how they feel. It is possible to agree to disagree. You may need someone else to help you resolve the disagreement. You could ask a trusted third person to act as a go-between and help you both get another view on the argument.

## Reasons for dealing with arguments

There are good reasons for dealing with arguments, including:

- It will give you a sense of achievement and make you feel more positive.
- You may feel more relaxed, healthier and more able to get a good night's sleep.
- You may develop stronger relationships.
- You may feel happier.

## Suggestions for long-term anger management

The way you typically express anger may take some time to modify. Suggestions include:

- Keep a diary of your anger outbursts, to try and understand how and why you get mad.
- Consider **assertiveness** training, or learning about techniques of **conflict resolution**.
- Learn relaxation techniques, such as **meditation** or **yoga**.
- See a counsellor or psychologist if you still feel angry about events that occurred in your past.
- Exercise regularly.

## Benefits of regular exercise in mood management

People who are stressed are more likely to experience anger. Numerous worldwide studies have documented that regular exercise can improve mood and reduce stress levels. This may be because physical exertion burns up stress chemicals, and it also boosts production of mood-regulating neurotransmitters in the brain, including endorphins and catecholamines.

## Teaching children how to express anger

Expressing anger appropriately is a learned behaviour. Suggestions on helping your **child to deal with strong feelings** include:

- Lead by example.
- Let them know that anger is natural and should be expressed appropriately.

- Treat your child's feelings with respect.
- Teach practical problem-solving skills.
- Encourage open and honest communication in the home.
- Allow them to express their anger in appropriate ways.
- Explain the difference between aggression and anger.
- Have consequences for aggression or violence, but not appropriately expressed anger.
- Teach your child different ways of calming and soothing themselves.

#### **Where to get help**

- Your **GP (doctor)**
- **Counsellor**
- **Kids Helpline** Tel. **1800 55 1800** (24-hour telephone counselling service for young people aged 5-25)
- **Lifeline** Tel. **13 11 14** (24-hour counselling service)
- **ReachOut.com**

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