



Anger

How to Manage Your Anger and Hostility

Introduction

- Research shows that 20% of Americans have levels of hostility that are potentially harmful to their health.
- Anger is not necessarily bad. The key issue is how often and how much we get angry and what we do when we become angry.
- Anger involves the “fight or flight” response which helps us protect ourselves from danger. The problem is that this fight or flight response is too easily triggered for some people. Many people overreact to minor frustrations and setbacks.

The Effects of Anger

- When you get angry, your body releases stress hormones-adrenaline and cortisol-into your bloodstream. These hormones can increase heart rate and blood pressure, suppress your immune system, weaken your health, and damage your arteries, which can result in chest pains or sometimes heart attacks.
- Chronic anger can drive friends and family members away, so the angry person loses the stress-buffering benefits of social support. Hostile people report less social support, less marital satisfaction, and more family conflict.
- Cynical, hostile people also tend to take more risks with their health, being more likely to smoke, drink alcohol and use drugs, and overeat. All these take a toll on one’s health.

“Blow Up” or “Put Up”?

- Should you express your anger and let it out, or should you suppress your feelings?
- *Research now shows that people who vent their anger get more angry, not less.* But suppressing anger isn’t the answer either.
- Here are 2 better options:
 - 1) You can raise your anger threshold. That is, allow fewer incidents to trigger your anger in the first place.
 - 2) When you get angry, you can choose how to react-without either denying your feelings or giving in to the situation.

Learning How to Defuse Anger and Hostility

Anger may seem like an automatic response to a person, event, or situation. But your angry feelings are usually a response to your own thoughts.

(*turn page over for more useful tips)

1) **Reason With Yourself**

How you interpret and explain a situation determines whether you will feel angry or not. Put yourself in a personal “hot spot” (i.e., go stand in the longest line at the grocery store) and ask yourself the following three (3) questions:

- Is this really important enough to get angry about?
- Am I justified in getting angry?
- Will getting angry make a difference?

2) **Defuse Anger in Relationships**

- State your observations about the problem(s).
- State what you think, what you are feeling, and what you want.

3) **Cool Off**

Breathe. Withdraw. Exercise. Laugh at yourself. Distract yourself.

4) **Stay in the present**

The best clue that anger may be coming from old resentments is when a “ten-cent” provocation triggers a “ten-dollar” response.

5) **Practice Empathy**

Reframe the situation by trying to see things from the other person’s point of view.

6) **Help Others**

Anger and hostility cut you off from the people around you. It makes you feel *apart from*- rather than *a part of*-the larger human community. Volunteering helps fight the isolation that fosters anger.

7) **Let it Go**

The following questions can help you evaluate whether a particular resentment is worth keeping. *Ask yourself:*

- Do I use my anger as a way of feeling more powerful or in control?
- Does my anger help me avoid communicating?
- Do I use my anger to punish others, or make them feel guilty?
- Do I use my anger to cover other feelings that I am trying to avoid?
- What do I gain by staying angry? What do I gain by giving up my anger?