





Canadian Mental
Health Association
Mental health for all

Feeling Angry?

We all feel angry sometimes. Most of the time, we can deal with feelings of anger or irritability quickly. We may resolve the situation or look at the problem from a different perspective. However, anger can cause problems in our lives and the lives of those around us.

What is Anger?

Anger is an emotion that tells us when something may be wrong. For example, we may feel angry when something is beyond our control or feels unfair, when we can't reach a goal, or when someone is hurt or threatened. We can also feel angry when we are under too much stress. Anger can involve a wide range of feelings. We may be a little annoyed over a minor incident, like being stuck in traffic or missing our bus. More serious problems, like getting hurt or seeing someone else get hurt, may cause strong feelings like rage. Sometimes, we just feel angry for no reason.

Anger may be a problem for you when it's:

- Much stronger than you'd expect based on the situation
- Very frequent, to the point that you can't enjoy things anymore
- Caused by something that happened a long time ago
- Making you act violently towards yourself, someone else, or someone's property
- Interfering with your ability to do your job
- Hurting your relationships with loved ones
- Affecting your physical health

What can I do about it?

Anger is a normal reaction to some situations. Anger can also be helpful when it matches the situation and motivates people to take action or work towards a goal. However, anger that's dealt with in unhealthy ways can create problems and affect your well-being. Fortunately, there are some things you can do to deal with your anger.

Immediate Strategies

These strategies won't solve the problem. Instead, they can help put you back in control so you can find a productive way to deal with the problem. They may also be useful if you find yourself saying or doing things in anger that you regret later.

- Leave the situation that's making you angry, if possible.
- Count to 10.
- Repeat calming phrases such as, "Take it easy" or, "Will this matter in six months?"
- Breathe deeply. Many people, especially adults, breathe from their chest, which doesn't give the benefits of a deep breath. Try to breathe deep into your stomach. You're on the right track if your stomach goes out first. It may seem simple, but taking deep breaths can help calm your mind, slow your heart, and even lower blood pressure.
- Try to shift your attention to something more pleasant or relaxing. This can be very helpful for minor annoyances that you can't control.

Short-Term Strategies

When you are calmer, these are strategies to help you look at your feelings around a particular situation. They don't take a lot of time, but they can make a big difference.

- Acknowledge that you are angry. Angry feelings don't go away if you bottle them up and avoid dealing with them.
- Consider whether your reaction matches the situation. Ask yourself, "What would I think of someone else if I saw them getting angry in this situation?" or, "Is this situation really as bad as I am making it out to be?" You can also ask someone you trust for their perspective—they may help you look at the problem in a more balanced way.
- Look at your thoughts. Sometimes the way you think can fuel anger—for example, assuming that another person is intentionally trying to hurt or annoy you, in a situation when that may not be true.
- Identify the source of your anger. If the actions or words of another person are hurting you, try to deal with them directly in a peaceful and productive way. Assertiveness skills can be a great way to do this.
- Look for humour in the situation—sometimes it's easy to take minor problems too seriously.

Longer-Term Solutions

These strategies take more time and effort, but they can help you cope with anger as it comes up in many different situations. The goal is to change the way you react to anger so it doesn't cause

problems in the first place.

- Learn what triggers your anger. Some people are triggered by other people, such as a boss, friend, or family member. Certain emotions, such as feeling controlled, ashamed or guilty, can also trigger anger for some people.
- Identify your early warning signs so you can take action before your anger turns into full-blown rage. Common early warning signs include a pounding heart, tight chest or jaw, feeling resentful or irritated, or feeling like lashing out.
- Talk to someone you trust who may be able to see things more clearly than you do. Remember that anger can tell us we need to solve a problem. Another person can help you practice identifying the real problem, brainstorming solutions, and testing solutions out.
- If your anger is caused by something beyond your control, such as a job loss, learn how others have dealt with a similar problem successfully and try their strategies.
- Learn and practice skills like healthy thinking, problem-solving and stress management. All of these can help manage anger.
- Many people find physical activity very helpful. Try going for a walk, playing your favourite sport, or cleaning the house.
- Make sure you eat well and get enough sleep. We often lose patience and get irritated more easily when we're tired or hungry.

- Learn mindfulness practices like meditation. Mindfulness teaches you how to look at your thoughts in the present moment without judgment. It may also help teach you to tolerate angry feelings without pushing them away.
- Learn more about assertiveness. Anger can persist when we avoid talking directly to someone about something that has made us angry. Assertiveness is a way of telling others what you feel or what you need while respecting their feelings or needs.
- If you feel easily frustrated when people don't act the way you want them to, remember that you cannot control how other people behave. You can only control how you choose to react to those behaviours.

Anger and irritability can sometimes be signs of depression or anxiety. If anger continues to cause problems or you notice that anger occurs with other symptoms, it's a good idea to talk with a doctor or mental health professional. ■

The Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA), founded in 1918, is a national charity that helps maintain and improve mental health for all Canadians. As the nationwide leader and champion for mental health, CMHA helps people access the community resources they need to build resilience and support recovery from mental illness. Visit the CMHA website at www.cmha.ca.

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