

Strategies for controlling your anger:

Keeping anger in check



Wrath, fury, rage — whatever you call it, anger is a powerful emotion. Unfortunately, it's often an unhelpful one.

Anger is a natural human experience, and sometimes there are valid reasons to get mad like feeling hurt by something someone said or did or experiencing frustration over a situation at work or home. But uncontrolled anger can be problematic for your personal relationships and for your health.

Fortunately, there are tools you can learn to help you keep your anger in check.

Understanding anger

Anger can take different forms. Some people feel angry much of the time, or can't stop dwelling on an event that made them mad. Others get angry less often, but when they do it comes out as explosive bouts of rage.

Whatever shape it takes, uncontrolled anger can negatively affect physical health and emotional wellbeing. [Research shows](#) that anger and hostility can increase people's chances of developing coronary heart disease, and lead to worse outcomes in people who already have heart disease.

Anger can also lead to stress-related problems including insomnia, digestive problems and headaches.

Anger can also contribute to violent and risky behaviors, including drug and alcohol use. And on top of all that, anger can significantly damage relationships with family, friends and colleagues.

Strategies to keep anger at bay

Anger can be caused by internal and external events. You might feel mad at a person, an entity like the company you work for, or an event like a traffic jam or a political election. Wherever the feelings come from, you don't have to let your anger get the better of you. Here are some techniques to help you stay calm.

Check yourself. It's hard to make smart choices when you're in the grips of a powerful negative emotion. Rather than trying to talk yourself down from a cliff, avoid climbing it in the first place. Try to identify warning signs that you're starting to get annoyed. When you recognize the signs, step away from the situation or try relaxation techniques to prevent your irritation from escalating.

Don't dwell. Some people have a tendency to keep rehashing the incident that made them mad. That's an unproductive strategy, especially if you have already resolved the issue that angered you in the first place. Instead, try to let go of the past incident. One way to do that is to focus instead on things you appreciate about the person or the situation that made you angry.

Change the way you think. When you're angry, it's easy to feel like things are worse than they really are. Through a technique known as cognitive restructuring, you can replace unhelpful negative thoughts with more reasonable ones. Instead of thinking "Everything is ruined," for example, tell yourself "This is frustrating, but it's not the end of the world."

Try these strategies to reframe your thinking:

- Avoid words like "never" or "always" when talking about yourself or others. Statements like "This never works" or "You're always forgetting things" make you feel your anger is justified. Such statements also alienate people who might otherwise be willing to work with you on a solution.
- Use logic. Even when it's justified, anger can quickly become irrational. Remind yourself that the world is not out to get you. Do this each time you start feeling angry, and you'll get a more balanced perspective.
- Translate expectations into desires. Angry people tend to demand things, whether it's fairness, appreciation, agreement or willingness to do things their way. Try to change your demands into requests. And if things don't go your way, try not to let your disappointment turn into anger.

Relax. Simple relaxation strategies, such as deep breathing and relaxing imagery, can help soothe angry feelings. If you practice one or more of these strategies often, it will be easier to apply them when angry feelings strike.

- **Focused breathing.** Shallow breathing is angry breathing. Practice taking controlled, slow breaths that you picture coming up from your belly rather than your chest.
- **Use imagery.** Visualize a relaxing experience from your memory or your imagination.
- **Progressive muscle relaxation.** With this technique, you slowly tense then relax each muscle group one at a time. For example, you might start with your toes and slowly work your way up to your head and neck.

Improve your communication skills. People often jump to conclusions when they're angry, and they can say the first (often unkind) thing that pops into their heads. Try to stop and listen before reacting. Then take time to think carefully about how you want to reply. If you need to step away to cool down before continuing the conversation, make a promise to come back later to finish the discussion.

Get active. Regular physical exercise can help you decompress, burn off extra tension and reduce stress that can fuel angry outbursts.

Recognize (and avoid) your triggers. Give some thought to the things that make you mad. If you know you always get angry driving downtown at rush hour, take the bus or try to adjust your schedule to make the trip at a less busy time. If you always argue with your spouse at night, avoid bringing up contentious topics when you're both tired. If you're constantly annoyed that your child hasn't cleaned his room, shut the door so you don't have to look at the mess.

You can't completely eliminate angry feelings. But you can make changes to the way those events affect you, and the ways in which you respond. By making the effort to keep your anger in check, you and the people close to you will be happier for the long run.

How a psychologist can help

If you continue to feel overwhelmed, consult with a psychologist or other licensed mental health professional who can help you learn how to control your anger. He or she can help you identify problem areas and then develop an action plan for changing them.

The American Psychological Association gratefully acknowledges psychologists Raymond W. Novaco, PhD, and Raymond DiGiuseppe, PhD, for their help with this fact sheet.

The full text of articles from APA Help Center may be reproduced and distributed for noncommercial purposes with credit given to the American Psychological Association. Any electronic reproductions must link to the original article on the APA Help Center. Any exceptions to this, including excerpting, paraphrasing or reproduction in a commercial work, must be presented in writing to the [APA](#). Images from the APA Help Center may not be reproduced.