

Everyone gets angry, and anger can sometimes be useful to motivate people and help them to deal with situations in which they need to be assertive. However, if anger is expressed in ways that are harmful to the person or others, or persists over a long period of time, then it can become a problem.

Anger tends to be experienced in the following ways:

- It can be acute or 'explosive' in nature when a person flies into a rage. With this type of anger there tends to be strong physical reactions such as muscle tension, heart palpitations and sweating.
- Longer-term anger or resentment. This type of anger tends to be the result of thinking negative thoughts over and over again – for example, replaying frustrating events over and over again or constantly having revenge fantasies.

While anger is often a response to perceived injustice or frustration, it can be driven by a range of feelings like sadness, hurt or feeling unsafe or threatened. For example, a parent may become angry with their child for crossing the road without looking, when, in fact, the driving emotion is fear for their safety.

When is anger a problem?

Anger can have its benefits when it is not accompanied by violence or intimidation. It can give people the courage to confront someone they do not usually have the courage to confront. Anger can also motivate people to be assertive, spurring them into action to help solve a problem or have their needs met. However, if anger gets out of hand and leads to actions such as hitting or threatening someone, or ending up with an assault charge, it becomes self-defeating. Intense or long-lasting anger is draining, and can affect relationships at home and at work. In the end, people's needs are more likely to be met and their relationships kept healthy if they can manage their anger and communicate their needs assertively rather than aggressively.

Anger may be a problem if:

- you feel angry a lot of the time
- your anger involves verbal, emotional or physical abuse of those around you
- you think the only way to get what you want is to be angry
- your anger is out of proportion to the trigger that set it off
- it takes a long time for your anger to subside after the situation triggering your anger has passed
- you feel anxious, remorseful or depressed about your anger
- you use alcohol or substances to manage your anger
- your anger is causing problems with your personal or work relationships, your health or the law

Getting help

There are effective treatments available to help people better manage their anger. One of the most effective treatments is cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT). This approach recognises that the way we think and act affects the way we feel. During CBT you will learn:

- to identify triggers and warning signs of anger
- to manage your reactions so you feel less angry (e.g., using distraction or breathing techniques to calm yourself down)
- to address thinking habits that lead to anger (e.g., learning to stop thinking constantly about situations that cause anger)
- to manage situations before they get out of control; this involves preparation prior to entering anger-provoking situations, coping with encountering the situation and evaluating what happened
- to imagine anger-triggering events and practice anger management skills in response; as the anger reaction emerges you will be encouraged to rehearse the techniques you have learned to manage how you feel
- to use specific skills such as solving problems, communicating more assertively, and negotiating effectively for what you need.

Self-management resources

Below is a list of internet and other written resources that may help you together with the treatment plan recommended by your doctor:

- Open Arms (<https://www.openarms.gov.au>) website includes information on mental health and wellbeing, wellbeing programs, smartphone apps and information booklets
- Useful materials are available from the Australian Psychological Society (www.psychology.org.au), Reach Out (www.reachout.com.au) and Men's Line Australia (<http://www.mensline.org.au/>).