

## Factsheet | Anger

*Anger is a powerful emotion. Many people have trouble managing their anger. If it isn't managed appropriately, it may have destructive results for both you and others around you. Uncontrolled anger can lead to arguments, physical fights, physical abuse, assault and self-harm.*

*On the positive side, well-managed anger can be useful to motivate you to make positive changes. All great social movements had their beginning in someone feeling angry. Anger is a powerful tool for social change on a personal and societal level. We can use our anger as a tool for change.*

### Is it always bad to feel Angry?

Anger is an emotion, not an action. Anger is a natural response to feeling attacked, injured or violated. Anger can help us survive, giving us the strength to fight back or run away when attacked or faced with injustice. In itself, it's neither good nor bad, but it can be frightening. People fear anger because they associate it with violence. Anger is not violence. Violence is an action. Anger is an emotion. When we make this distinction clearly, we can develop a much better attitude about anger.

Angry feelings can lead to destructive and violent behaviour, and so we tend to be frightened of anger. The way we are brought up, and our cultural background, will influence how we might feel about expressing anger. You may have been punished for expressing it when you were small, or you may have witnessed your parents' or other adults' anger when it was out of control, destructive and terrifying. Or you may have been frightened by the strength of your own bad temper. All of this might encourage you to suppress anger.

### It Is what we do with Anger that Is Important

- We can use anger to lash out at others and intimidate them
- We can turn it inward and beat ourselves up
- We can use it to speak out with firmness and increase our self esteem
- We can use it to correct a situation that is wrong

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. Heart rate, blood pressure and respiration increase, the body temperature rises and the skin perspires. The mind is sharpened and focused. As long as the build-up of tension is usually released in action or words, you should be able to cope with feeling frustrated occasionally. But if, as a rule, you bottle up feelings, they may turn inwards and contribute to problems - physically and mentally.

## Emotional Effects

- Depression (when the anger is turned inwards)
- Addictions (to alcohol, tobacco, or illegal drugs)
- Compulsions (eating disorders, such as excessive dieting or binge-eating, overworking, unnecessary cleaning, etc)
- Bullying behaviour (especially expressing racist, sexist or homophobic views)

## Health Problems

The constant flood of stress chemicals and associated metabolic changes that accompany recurrent unmanaged anger can eventually cause harm to many different systems of the body. Some of the short and long term health problems may include:

## Physical Effects

- Digestion (contributing to development of heartburn, ulcers, colitis, gastritis or irritable bowel syndrome)
- Heart / circulatory system (blocked arteries)
- Blood pressure (high)
- Joints and muscles (inflammations, such as arthritis)
- Immune system (more likely to catch 'flu and other bugs, less able to recover)
- Pain threshold (more sensitive to pain).

## 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 can isolate themselves from family and friends.
- 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 inappropriate times or events.