

Anger: What it is and what it does

Anger is a FEELING. Like all feelings, it is neither good nor bad – it just IS. We all feel angry at times. Anger is NOT any particular action. It does not “make” us yell, hit walls, or throw tantrums. When managed appropriately, it helps motivate us to beneficial action. For example, it may move us to fight for a just cause or stand up for the oppressed. In this way anger can actually be USEFUL to us.

Unfortunately, unmanaged anger triggers a physical response in the body which can lead to a variety of issues. Let’s take a closer look at some of those:

Physical Impact of Anger

Anger triggers the body’s Fight, Flight or Freeze response. During periods of strong negative emotions (anger, anxiety, fear) stress hormones including adrenaline and cortisol, flood the body. The brain starts moving blood flow away from the internal organs and towards the muscles to fuel them for rapid use. Here are some of the changes your body undergoes during this process:

- Heart and respiration rates speed up
- blood pressure and body temperature rise
- skin perspires
- The mind is sharpened and focused.

While all of this is terrific if you are about to surge into battle or run for your life, it’s not so good when you are being chewed out by your boss during a staff meeting.

Health Problems related to Anger

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.

Unmanaged anger has been linked with:

- **Headache**
- **Suppressed immune system**
- **Gastrointestinal problems**
- **Skin problems**
- **Insomnia**
- **Increased anxiety**
- **Depression**
- **High blood pressure**
- **Heart attack**
- **Stroke.**

Adjusting for Life: Anger Management

The first step to managing anger appropriately is recognizing your early warning signs. These are the physical signs your body gives you that something is about to blow. Some common signs of anger are listed in the chart below. Write in any additional signs you have noticed in yourself.

Signs of Anger

Physical signs	Mental Signs	Behavioral Signs
Fast heart beat Sweating Shaking Clenched jaws Clenched fists Fast breathing Headaches Stomach aches Upset feeling in the stomach Tight chest Tense muscles Frowning or Scowling Hot or Red face	Problems concentrating Confusion Memory problems Thoughts of doing harm Angry thoughts Irritability Jumpy	Inability to sit still Withdrawing from others Throwing things Pacing Yelling

Listen to Your Body

Think about a time recently when you were angry. Now, shade or circle the areas in your body where you felt that anger.

Head pounding? Tight chest? Clenched fists? Butterflies in the belly?

What is the FIRST sign you notice when you are getting angry?

