Why Can’t I Control My Anger?

Anger is a feeling that affects us all. Things that can make us feel angry include a threat to us or people close to us, a blow to our self-esteem or social standing in a group, being interrupted when we’re pursuing a goal, being treated unfairly and feeling unable to change this, being verbally or physically assaulted, or someone going against a principle we feel is important.

Anger is an important emotion, according to Celia Richardson of the Mental Health Foundation.

“It’s the one that tells us we need to take action to put something right,” she says. “Anger is a problem-solving emotion. It gives us strength and energy, and motivates us to act.”

But for some, anger can get out of control and cause problems with relationships, work and even the law.

Physical signs of anger

Everyone has a physical response to anger. Our body releases the hormone adrenalin, making our heart beat faster and making us breathe quicker and sweat more. This allows us to focus on the threat and react quickly, but it can also mean we don’t think straight, and maybe react in ways we might regret later on.

“One person in five has ended a relationship because of the way the other person dealt with anger,” says Celia. “Reports show that anger problems are as common as depression and anxiety, but people don’t often see it as a problem, or don’t realise there are ways to tackle it.”

Individual reactions to being angry

How people react to feeling angry depends on many things including the situation, their family history, cultural background, gender and general stress levels.

People can express anger verbally, by shouting. Sometimes this can be aggressive, involving swearing, threats or name-calling. Some people react violently and lash out physically, hitting other people, pushing them or breaking things.

Other people might hide their anger or turn it against themselves. They can be very angry on the inside but feel unable to let it out.

It’s important to deal with anger in a healthy way that doesn’t harm you or anyone else. Intense and unresolved anger is linked to health conditions such as high blood pressure, depression, anxiety and heart disease. It can also affect your relationships and your work, and get you into trouble with the law.

Dealing with anger in a healthy way includes:
- recognising when you get angry
- taking time to cool down
- reducing the amount of stress in your life

You can also look at what makes you angry, and how you deal with those feelings. The Mental Health Foundation’s Cool Down: anger and how to deal with it booklet may also help. It includes advice on where you can go if you want professional support.

The charity Mind also provides information about dealing with anger in a healthy way.