

# Tip sheet

## Irritability and anger

**Irritability** is a feeling of agitation. You're likely to become frustrated or upset easily. The causes of irritability can vary from stress, anxiety, sleep deprivation, lack of exercise, physical illness (medical condition), medication, or substance withdrawal (including caffeine).

Most people feel irritable from time to time. For example, it's normal to feel irritable after a poor night's rest. Be mindful of this not escalating to behaviours of anger.

**Anger** is a natural emotion. It is often the simplest indication that something is just not right. Anger is generally a reaction to an event (a defensive response), involving a mixture of complex feelings that trigger a response in our body, behaviours and thought processes. But unmanaged anger can become a problem.



- Avoid doing two things at once (such as eating and reading)
- Talk to someone who you are not feeling angry with
- Slow down – try a deep muscle relaxation technique
- Try some 'new and improved' variations of counting to ten. For instance, try counting to ten with a deep slow breath in between each number
- Deep breathing - from your diaphragm - helps people relax.

These tips may not address the anger directly, but it can minimise the damage you may do.

### Responding to your emotions

- Ask yourself:
  - 'Will the object of my anger matter in the future?'
  - 'What is the worst consequence?'
  - 'Did that person do this to me on purpose?'
- Ask others, 'Was I wrong?'
- Think about when and where you learned your reactions to anger
- Spend 10 minutes outside sitting in a park or garden
- Laugh at a joke, situation, or yourself

## Physical reactions

In addition to psychological changes, like any emotion, anger is accompanied by physiological changes. When you get angry your adrenaline flows, your heart rate increases, and your blood pressure escalates.

When expressed appropriately, anger is an entirely normal response. However, people who 'fly off the handle' may be at risk for heart disease or other illnesses, so it is important to know how often you place yourself at risk.



Irritability and anger are signs that something is wrong, and if those signs are recognised, they can be used positively and energise us to deal with situations, help us to express our feelings, and inform us about people and situations. It is the way that we view and interpret the event that causes us to respond with anger.

## Sign to watch for

- When anger is too frequent
- When anger is too intense
- When anger lasts too long.
- When anger leads to aggression
- When anger disturbs work or personal relationships.

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