

# Anger and Chronic Pain

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## What is anger?

Anger is a natural emotional response that everyone experiences from time to time. It is an emotion that can range from mild irritation to intense rage.

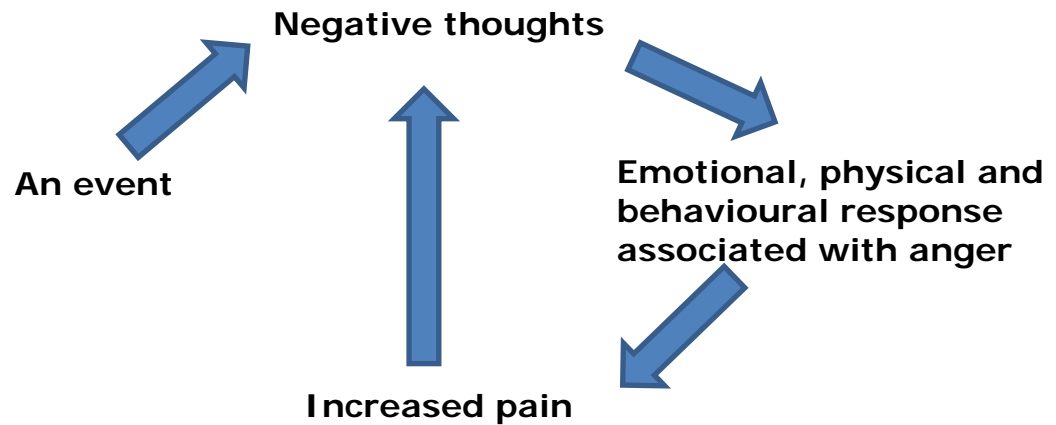
The experience of anger is related to the way we think about something that happens. When we are feeling threatened anger prepares us to attack or defend ourselves. This is why anger is called an adaptive response.

## Anger and pain

A higher expression of anger is linked with:

- an increase in pain intensity
- a decreased pain tolerance
- an increased disability
- an increase in negative coping behaviours such as smoking, drinking, overeating or drug use
- poor sleep quality
- greater interpersonal conflict
- less social support
- higher levels of anxiety and depression
- poor treatment outcomes

## Pain / Anger Cycle



How your body responds to anger (physiological changes):

- Increased heart rate
- increased blood pressure
- Increased rate of breathing
- release of adrenaline
- tightening of muscles
- senses more acute, which means you are more aware of what is going on around you

} The body preparing for “Fight or Flight” —response to perceived threat

<b>Costs of Anger</b>	<b>Benefits of Anger</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• causes discomfort</li><li>• makes it difficult to inhibit damaging/unfortunate actions</li><li>• impairs performance and efficiency at higher levels of anger arousal</li><li>• may compromise health</li><li>• carries risk of serious, negative outcomes</li><li>• promotes negative self-image as a defective angry person</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• a signal that something is wrong</li><li>• provides energy to right a wrong</li><li>• may trigger problem-solving to resolve real threats/issues that impact our lives</li><li>• provides energy to fight illness, do what is necessary</li><li>• gives us the courage to change</li><li>• if used to fuel self-assertion, may improve self-esteem</li></ul>

## What does your anger look like?

Physical	Emotional	Behavioural
<input type="checkbox"/> Grit teeth	<input type="checkbox"/> Feel like running away	<input type="checkbox"/> Cry/yell/scream
<input type="checkbox"/> Headache	<input type="checkbox"/> Depressed	<input type="checkbox"/> Use substances
<input type="checkbox"/> Sweaty palms	<input type="checkbox"/> Guilty	<input type="checkbox"/> Get sarcastic
<input type="checkbox"/> Dizzy	<input type="checkbox"/> Feel resentment	<input type="checkbox"/> Lose sense of humour
<input type="checkbox"/> Red-faced	<input type="checkbox"/> Anxious	<input type="checkbox"/> Become abusive
<input type="checkbox"/> Stomach ache	<input type="checkbox"/> Feel like lashing out	<input type="checkbox"/> Withdraw
<input type="checkbox"/> _____	<input type="checkbox"/> _____	<input type="checkbox"/> _____
<input type="checkbox"/> _____	<input type="checkbox"/> _____	<input type="checkbox"/> _____
<input type="checkbox"/> _____	<input type="checkbox"/> _____	<input type="checkbox"/> _____

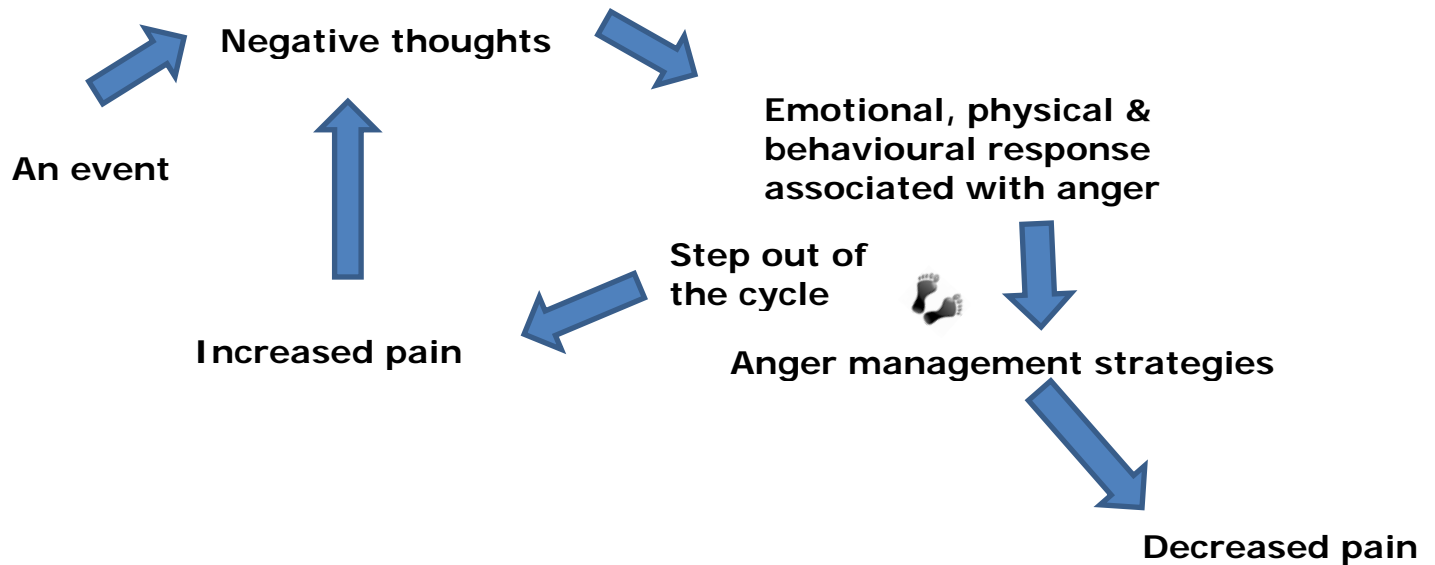
## Does your anger ...

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Last too long?            | <input type="checkbox"/> Creep out in unexpected ways? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Become too intense?       | <input type="checkbox"/> Come too often?               |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Lead to aggression?       | <input type="checkbox"/> Flare up too quickly?         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Impair relationships?     | <input type="checkbox"/> _____                         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Interfere with parenting? | <input type="checkbox"/> _____                         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Interfere with work?      | <input type="checkbox"/> _____                         |

## Anger styles

	Escalator	Stuffer
T R A I T S	<input type="checkbox"/> Escalate into rage <input type="checkbox"/> Tries to control but fails <input type="checkbox"/> Blame & shame “provoker” <input type="checkbox"/> Leads to abusive situations	<input type="checkbox"/> Stuff your anger <input type="checkbox"/> Avoids direct confrontation <input type="checkbox"/> Denies anger to self & others <input type="checkbox"/> May not know right to be angry
R E A S O N S	<input type="checkbox"/> Feeling “I have no other choice” <input type="checkbox"/> To show an image of strength/power <input type="checkbox"/> To avoid expressing underlying emotions <input type="checkbox"/> Fear of getting close to someone <input type="checkbox"/> Its learned behaviour <input type="checkbox"/> Lack of communication skills <input type="checkbox"/> _____ <input type="checkbox"/> _____ <input type="checkbox"/> _____	<input type="checkbox"/> Fear of offending <input type="checkbox"/> Fear of being disliked <input type="checkbox"/> Fear of being rejected <input type="checkbox"/> Fear of losing control <input type="checkbox"/> Feeling its not OK to be angry <input type="checkbox"/> Feeling unable to cope with such a strong, intense emotion <input type="checkbox"/> Fear of damaging/losing a relationship <input type="checkbox"/> Its learned behaviour <input type="checkbox"/> Trying to use a different style than I was raised with <input type="checkbox"/> _____ <input type="checkbox"/> _____
P R O B L E M S	<input type="checkbox"/> Results may be short-term <input type="checkbox"/> Physical destruction <input type="checkbox"/> Impairs relationships <input type="checkbox"/> Compromises physical health <input type="checkbox"/> Legal ramifications <input type="checkbox"/> _____ <input type="checkbox"/> _____	<input type="checkbox"/> Anger comes out anyway <input type="checkbox"/> Impairs relationships <input type="checkbox"/> Compromises physical health <input type="checkbox"/> Compromises mental health <input type="checkbox"/> Stored up for next time???? <input type="checkbox"/> _____ <input type="checkbox"/> _____

## Breaking the cycle of anger and pain



## Managing anger

### Step 1: Develop Awareness

- a) **Environmental Awareness** – be aware of triggers in your environment
- Verbal/physical abuse sarcasm
    - Is there a person who knows just what to say to make you angry?
  - Annoyances and Irritations
    - Is there excessive noise, interruptions?
  - Common frustrations
    - Are you prevented/blocked from something you want, disappointed?
  - Perceived injustices
    - Do you feel you have been treated unfairly?

b) **Physical Awareness** – be aware of physical changes in your body that serve as a warning signal for your anger

- Heart racing
- Muscle tension
- Jaw or fist clenching
- Flushed face

c) **Behavioural Awareness** – be aware of changes in your behaviour as they can determine whether anger will fade or continue to get worse.

- Pacing back and forth
- Stiff posture
- Tapping foot or finger

## Step 2: Modify Internal Responses

a) **Physical** – use relaxation strategies to counter the physical changes:

- Deep breathing
- Progressive muscle relaxation
- Meditation/imagery

b) **Cognitive** (thinking) – Use strategies to counter the environmental and behavioural triggers of anger:

- Try to consider the feelings of others. We often become angry because we are making assumptions of what others are thinking and feeling.
- Think about your own feelings are you really angry, or are you feeling something else?
- Use humour to take the edge off and diffuse the situation.

c) Use cognitive restructuring techniques:

- Identify the automatic thoughts behind the feeling of anger — “she did that on purpose”, she doesn’t care about me”.
- Avoid traps that increase your anger — believing that everyone is out to get you, think you must have everything your way, exaggerating the importance of an event.
- Challenge your cognitive errors/negative thoughts and generate other options of events.
- Replace unhelpful negative thoughts with more positive coping thoughts.

**Step 3: Respond Assertively**

- Refer to Communication Handouts.

**Thoughts to help manage your anger**

**You have the right to be angry.** It is legal. It is what you do with your anger that is important. You can make it work for you, or you can let it work on you.

**People/events do not make you angry.** It is your feelings about people/events that create your anger. It is the meaning you attach to a person or situation that determines your emotional response.

**Frustration results from unmet expectations.** Do you need to rethink your expectations?



**Keep your remarks focused on the action, not the person.**

**Use 'I' statements to let the person know how you are feeling.**

Blaming, or pointing the finger can make them defensive. This prevents either of you from identifying a solution.

**Make sure you are angry with the right person or situation.** We often stuff our anger and then up “losing it” over something little.

**Be careful of words like 'always' and 'never'.** These types of words are overgeneralizations. They are not usually accurate and can lead to continued feelings of resentment.

**Retaliation or 'getting back' is unlikely to help you achieve your goals.** The satisfaction you may feel will be short lived.

**Resentment towards others hurts you more that it hurts them.**

Often they do not even know that you are holding resentment towards them — it is your energy being consumed, not theirs.

**Always ask for an explanation or clarification first.** Miscommunication can fuel a lot of anger unnecessarily.

**Recognize when you have achieved your goal.** Do not continue to hold onto your anger or resentment after the person has apologized or attempted to fix the situation.

**I am allowed to have a 'time out'** as long as I return within an appropriate amount of time to finish the discussion. Walking away and not returning will lead to continued resentment.

## Questions to ask your self when angry:

- What are my thoughts?
- Do I have a reason to be angry?
- Is my anger targeted at the right person?
- Is my reaction appropriate or am I over reacting?
- What thoughts would be more appropriate?

## Things I can do to help manage my anger more effectively

- Count to 10 before I react.
- Ask myself “is this really important?”
- Go for a long walk.
- Listen to music.
- Do some meditation or relaxation.
- Tell the other person how I am feeling using ‘I’ statements.
- I will not attack the other person (using insults or put downs).
- I will work on finding a compromise or a common middle ground.
- Other ways \_\_\_\_\_