

Your Employee Assistance Program is a support service that can help you take the first step toward change.

Keeping a Lid on Anger

There are lots of colorful descriptions used to describe an expression of anger: hot-headed, blood boiling, flipping your lid, blowing your top, or as the cartoonists would have it—steam coming out of your ears.

While you may think of anger as something to avoid, it's actually a survival instinct that can positively propel you to try harder, do better and make constructive changes. But when it becomes a constant presence in your life, anger can damage relationships, make those around you feel intimidated or disengaged, create health issues and, in some cases, lead to violence.

Learn to cool the temperature of that boiling blood or hot head before it becomes a destructive influence in your life by:

Getting to the *why* of your anger. Uncovering the source of a testy temper is a great place to start when focusing on behavior change. Anger has many sources: force of habit, fear of losing control, a traumatic event in the past, pride and emotional pain can all cause a person to overreact to a situation.

Ironically, people who are overly-passive can develop anger issues too: instead of assertively handling challenges as they arise, they end up reaching a breaking point and "exploding." Identifying the causes of your anger can help you develop a more effective anger management plan.

Avoiding anger activators. Explore what sets your anger off. Do you feel your blood pressure rise when a colleague or family member challenges your authority? Do last-minute projects unloaded on you send your temper into a tailspin? Or perhaps you're more moody when a group of co-workers overlooks inviting you to a lunch meeting. Understanding your triggers will help you keep anger at bay when these activators arise.

Recognizing the "perks" of your anger. It may seem unusual to think of anger as being constructive, but losing your cool can come about because you need to:

- Feel heard and/or respected
- "Blow off steam"
- Feel stronger or less afraid of someone or something, or, less positively
- Avoid dealing with sadness or grief

Breathing. The old "breathe and count to 10" adage truly can help you calm down. Deep, focused, breathing not only takes your mind off the source of your anger, it can also slow your heart rate and lower your blood pressure. When you feel your anger rising:

- Sit down in a chair with your back straight and feet sitting flat.
- Inhale deeply through your nose so that your belly expands slightly.
- Exhale, letting the breath escape through your slightly parted lips.
- Repeat five to 10 times until you feel "cooled off."

Choosing flight over fight. If you feel like your anger is about to bubble over, remove yourself from the situation and suggest another, calmer time to discuss the matter. You'll give yourself the valuable time you need to think things through (rather than reacting purely on emotion) and will avoid saying or

doing something you're sure to regret.
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Listening to your inner voice's spin and challenging it. Often the difference between a "hot-headed" response and a "laid-back" one is in the approach to the issue. Instead of thinking defensively when a challenging project lands in your lap—e.g., "my boss is out to get me"—put a positive spin on the situation—e.g., "this could be a real chance for me to shine." The way you perceive challenges in your head is a big part of the solution.

Managing moodiness. Sleep deprivation, a poor diet, hunger and thirst can all leave you feeling cranky and unprepared to deal appropriately with stressful situations or conflict. Learn to spot physical cues that can set you off and respond accordingly by getting more rest, eating a healthy diet, drinking lots of water and keeping your blood sugar levels stable.

Positively blowing off steam. Put pent up anger to good use: enroll in a boxing class after work; go for a run on the weekend or power walk on your lunch break. Regular physical activity can boost your mood and help you "exorcise" negative energy.

Seek support. If your anger is interfering with your relationships or impacting your work or home life, help is available—professional support can provide you with effective anger management tools, strategies and support.

Anger is a natural and necessary part of life. But it should never be a *way of life*. By paying close attention to signals from your mind and body, and responding more consciously, you can harness the energy created by anger and shape it into a truly positive force.