

# Anger Management

In today's fast-paced society anger has become a major problem. We see people getting angry on the streets, at work and on television, often with little provocation. Anger can sometimes happen so rapidly it can be overwhelming, leading to loss of control and judgement flies out of the window and we do things we later regret. But why has it become so common and what can we do about it?

## **Nutrition**

In 2003 a ground-breaking study was done by the University of Oxford in on young offenders at the Aylesbury Young Offenders Unit. Some offenders were given a multivitamin tablet and a fatty acid supplement and these were compared with those given dummy pills. In those given the genuine supplements violent behaviour went down by 35%. Similar results have been seen before (at the Pfeiffer Clinic in the USA).

Paul Walsh, a scientist working at the Illinois' Stateville Prison looked at offenders with uncontrollable loss of temper but later remorse. They had a specific pattern: high copper levels and low zinc, sodium and potassium. Those that were cruel, defiant and unremorseful had low copper and zinc with high sodium and potassium.

Dr Neil Ward also looked at offenders in the UK and found a pattern of high heavy metals (aluminium, lead and cadmium) which were respectively six times, three times and two times higher than controls. They also had low selenium, chromium and zinc. There is a pattern here: loss of self-control associated with excess heavy metals and low levels of essential minerals. As zinc antidotes copper and other heavy metals it makes sense for anyone with this pattern of behaviour to take extra zinc. Start with 30-50mg daily for 1 month then reduce to 15mg daily. Also consider adding selenium and chromium. To reduce heavy metals further look at the toxicity leaflet.

It is likely that most of us would be calmer and less angry with a multivitamin and an essential fat supplement (see Fats: Good and Bad). I believe the fatty acids were likely to be the more important as they affect brain function and previous studies have found that Decosahexaenoic Acid (DHA) and folic acid reduce aggression. DHA is a major constituent of the brain. The richest dietary source is fish and fish oils.

This study reminds me of the work of Robert McCarrison in the early part of the twentieth century. He fed rats on the typical British diet of the time (high in sugar, refined carbohydrates, potatoes and tinned meat). They became irritable, bit their keepers and attacked and sometimes killed weaker rats. However rats fed on the diet of healthy populations of the time (Sikhs and Hunzas) remained alert, easy to handle and lived harmoniously with their other rats. This was a diet rich in natural foods, fruit and vegetable with small amounts of meat. McCarrison has demonstrated how diet profoundly affects behaviour.

### **Psychological Techniques**

Occasionally anger is beneficial: it can motivate someone to deal with an injustice, but more often it is harmful.

Any attempt to deal with anger will bring greater peace of mind and happiness. Anger management courses have sprung up in many places and have some success, although methods vary. Some use methods which release anger such as thumping a pillow, but these can be a two-edged sword, sometimes making the problem worse. Whatever method you use, give it time to work.

It's useful to know a little about how the brain works: it's geared to **learning to do things automatically**. It takes a while for us to learn to drive but once we can, we can then drive without thinking. The same is true of anger, each time we get angry we reinforce the anger

pathway and this makes it easier for us to get angry again. To resolve this we need to do two things: **firstly to change the pathway so it happens less automatically** and **secondly to deliberately cultivate its opposite, which is patience and tolerance**. Both these will lead to more control, more peace of mind and more happiness. Decide now that you'd rather have peace of mind than anger.

The first step is changing our response to anger. If the anger is not overwhelming the best course is to **see the situation in a new, more tolerant light**. If someone cuts you up while driving, consider they might be in a rush to help someone; if a customer is rude or aggressive consider they might have slept badly or may under stress at home and if someone is playing loud music then perhaps remember a time when you did the same. If someone insults you, remember you have a choice about whether to be offended or not. It's empowering to know that whatever

others say and do, it doesn't have to get to you (and then it stays with them). Think *"If you think this is going to ruin my day you'll be disappointed"* or *"Let them try to get me to lose my temper, let it be of no use"*

Each time you would normally get angry, look at it in a different way and **if you don't manage to change it at the time then run it through your mind later**, perhaps before going to sleep, **but give it a different ending**, one in which you show more tolerance. This helps change the anger pathway.

It is often useful to say to yourself "this is anger" rather than "I am angry". If you repeat the two phrases notice that they feel different and create a bit of distance from the emotion. Keep your observations "clean" –don't add to it by blaming others or yourself. **Each time you think more tolerantly you are reducing the chance of getting angry next time around; however like learning to drive it can take a while before it becomes automatic.** If you need an extra incentive, the Buddhists have an interesting idea. They believe those who develop patience and pleasant speech come back as more beautiful or handsome next time around. I have no idea if this is true but it's a pleasant thought and you never know, they might be right.

One danger is wanting to get even. This is natural but unhelpful because even if you do get even you'll still feel bad at some level. At the very least you'll lose your peace of mind and sometimes you can lose a lot more. Then there's the guilt and remorse. It just isn't worth it.

**If anger is rapid and overwhelming** you may need to act in a different way. Typically, if two people are getting angry the situation can rapidly escalate in a chain of negativity as one person's anger feeds off the other's anger. Ideally quickly remove yourself from the situation. Then as soon as possible switch your attention to something pleasant: for instance think of a past holiday, something you would love to do, winning the lottery or being with someone you love. If this is difficult, use the traditional technique of breathing as slowly as you can and counting to ten. Feel the anger dissolving with each count. Analyse the situation later and see it with a different ending where you were able to control your anger.

However to deal with anger fully you need to deliberately develop its opposite: patience and tolerance. This is crucial to improving the situation and is a good thing to do anyway as it brings peace of mind.

This is something everybody wants. Use your creativity and imagination to become more tolerant when a person is behaving in an irritating way and see their good points, even if you have to search a bit. If it's a situation like a computer crashing – say "it is as it is" and if the anger doesn't settle then later on imagine yourself dealing with it in a more laid-back fashion. There will be many, many opportunities to practice this, and each time you do this successfully congratulate yourself that you are developing more patience and less anger. You can say to yourself "I am in no hurry for this experience to end" (eg red light turning to green). Many people have noticed that as they do this, something extremely interesting happens: less of the situations that used to make them angry crop up in their lives.