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WINNER  
GRAND AWARD  
APEX 2017

WINNER  
AWARD OF EXCELLENCE  
APEX 2017

# Lifewise

## SOUPER CHARGED

DISCOVER  
THE HEALTH  
BENEFITS  
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**psyched  
up**

THE FUTURE  
OF WELLNESS



Adding years of healthy life



## ANGER IS AN EMOTION

everyone experiences.

While it is healthy to express one's innermost feelings, it is just as important to learn how to manage anger in a constructive and non-harmful manner. "Anger usually occurs in response to a perceived threat," explains Dr Hanita Assudani, Senior Clinical Psychologist with the Institute of Mental Health (IMH). The threat can be directed at you, your loved ones, your property, your self-image, your emotional safety or a part of your identity.

But how exactly do we get angry — and why? When threats are identified, the amygdala, the emotion-regulating centre of our brain, is activated. This releases hormones that cause physical and emotional alarm, preparing the body to flee or fight the threat. When this happens, our breathing rate increases, our heart pumps blood more quickly to the brain, and our muscles tense up.

Anger can vary in intensity, from mild irritation to rage. Some people get angry

more easily and more intensely. Others may not show how they are feeling overtly, and appear to be in a bad mood. "It is natural and healthy to feel angry. Expressing anger in a constructive way allows us to assert our needs, as well as to protect ourselves and others," says Dr Assudani.

## The Facts On Fury

Anger is generally viewed negatively because the feeling is unpleasant and can be harmful if it gets out of control. "This is when a person reacts aggressively or violently," says Dr Assudani. Anger may be expressed more destructively when we are hungry, stressed, ill or fatigued; or when a person is intoxicated or experiencing hormonal fluctuations. The reason for this is that the part of the brain (prefrontal cortex) that controls our judgement, behaviour, and impulses may not be functioning at its best. Thus we may be more subjected to our instinctual responses.

**WHILE ANGER IS A NORMAL HUMAN EMOTION, IT CAN BECOME DESTRUCTIVE WHEN IT SPIRALS OUT OF CONTROL.**

BY **LI YULING** IN CONSULTATION WITH  
**DR HANITA ASSUDANI** SENIOR CLINICAL  
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# DON'T look back in ANGER







## WE MAY NOT BE ABLE TO CONTROL OUR FEELINGS OF ANGER, BUT WE CAN CONTROL THE WAY WE EXPRESS OUR ANGER.

DR HANITA ASSUDANI, SENIOR CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGIST, INSTITUTE OF MENTAL HEALTH (IMH)

Anger becomes a problem when it continually affects a person's relationships, social, occupational or daily functioning, or if maladaptive coping is used to deal with the anger. Maladaptive-coping methods, such as the use of alcohol or drugs, self-harm, and violence, relieve symptoms temporarily but do not address the root cause of the anger.

At the same time, bottling up feelings of anger can negatively affect our health in similar ways that stress does. Long-term suppression of anger has been linked to health problems such as skin disorders, digestive ailments and headaches. It may also increase the risk of dying from heart disease and contracting certain forms of cancer.

### Keeping Anger In Check

Identifying the cause of anger is an important first step towards anger management. Some people may be annoyed by disrespectful acts or remarks, while others may get worked up only when their physical safety is threatened. "Anger can also be a substitute emotion or a 'cover' for pain," says Dr Assudani. For example, a person experiencing the loss of loved one may destroy things or exhibit unreasonable behaviour towards others to cope with the grief — because it feels better to cope with the grief — because it feels better to be angry than it does to be in pain.

A US study found that depression in men often manifests as anger and frustration, while another British study observed that men are also less likely to seek help when depressed. In a recent interview with *Channel NewsAsia*, Dr Mok Yee Ming, senior consultant and chief of IMH's Department of Mood and Anxiety, says, "For men, there is the added expectation to be masculine, and not to be emotional."

The way adults respond to anger may also have a direct effect on children's behavioural problems. "We may not be able to control our anger, but we can control the way we express our anger," says Dr Assudani. "It is always better to address such behavioural issues earlier rather than later, so that changes and positive habits can be introduced from a younger age."

Here are some steps to better manage anger:

- **LEARN** to identify your personal warning signs of anger. These include increased heart rate, shallower breaths, flushed face, and clenched teeth.
- **TRY** relaxation techniques such as taking slow, deep breaths or counting to 10.
- **EXPRESS** your anger in a non-violent way. For example, say, "I'm angry at you" instead of using expletives.
- **FIND** non-violent and non-antagonising ways to solve the problem. Ask yourself, "How can I resolve this amicably?"
- **FOCUS** on positive or neutral thoughts.
- **MOVE AWAY** if you notice someone is angry. Do not engage the person.
- **TAKE CARE** of your well-being. Exercise, go on holidays, or 'vent' to a good friend. Reading self-help books and attending counselling sessions can also be helpful in managing anger.

If the underlying reason for anger is a mental health problem, medication such as mood stabilisers or anti-anxiolytics may be helpful. However, Dr Assudani points out that taking such psychotropic medications may be counter-productive and harmful to healthy individuals. While the medications may have a calming effect, they ultimately do not allow the person to learn how to cope with their emotions. Instead, individuals may become reliant on the medication to suppress their anger. **LOW**

*If you have difficulty managing your anger, speak with your doctor, or call the 24-hour Mental Health Helpline at 6389-2222.*

### CASHING IN ON CHAOS

In recent years, "rage rooms" have been seen as a form of "therapy" to alleviate anger, stress and frustration. These purpose-built rooms allow individuals to freely smash, throw and kick items in a confined space. But is this feeling of catharsis really the antidote to your pent-up aggression? "It may help in the moment to release the discomfort caused by anger, but in the long run, it does not help you to develop a better, less impulsive way of dealing with anger," says Dr Assudani.

