

Anger

What is anger?

Anger is a normal emotion and a part of being human. It is a feeling that usually occurs when we are required to protect ourselves or if we feel under attack in some way. It can have an energising effect by mobilising and motivating us, which in some cases can protect us from danger. Anger is an appropriate emotion for many circumstances as it helps us to cope with difficult life events and allows us to overcome obstacles.

However, in some cases, anger can become problematic. That is, when it starts to occur too frequently, lasts for too long, is too intense and/or results in aggressive behaviour. Anger can also inhibit our ability to process information accurately and therefore results in impaired judgment, decision making and problem solving.

It is important to distinguish the difference between anger and aggression. Anger is an emotional reaction that is sometimes appropriate. Anger can activate aggressive behaviour. In the military we train people to use controlled aggression, but sometimes this flows on to private lives. Uncontrolled aggression is a negative, destructive behaviour that intends to produce damage or harm to someone or something. It usually takes the form of physical or verbal abuse and the resulting damage is generally physical, psychological or emotional harm.

If you find you have difficulty controlling your anger there are things that you can do to learn to control and better manage your anger. Anger management doesn't mean that you learn to suppress your anger or never feel angry again. Rather, it encourages you to understand, prevent and regulate your anger responses in a more appropriate way.

What are the sign and symptoms of anger?

Some of the common signs and symptoms of anger include:

- Feelings of nervousness or anxiety
- Rapid heart rate and breathing
- Perspiration
- Having a dry mouth
- Flushed face
- Feeling hot
- Muscle tension
- Nervous twitches
- Inability to sit still
- Headaches
- Appetite changes
- Feeling confused or forgetful
- Difficulty concentrating
- Short temper
- Being irritable
- Being uncomfortable with criticism
- Withdrawing from others

- Sleep difficulties

The signs and symptoms that people experience will vary. Most people do not experience all of these symptoms at once, and some of these symptoms may indicate issues other than anger. Talk to a professional if you want further guidance on this.

What can I do to reduce my anger reactions?

There are a number of skills that you can learn to help manage your anger. Some of these include:

- Maintaining a healthy lifestyle,
- Learning and practicing relaxation and controlled breathing,
- Learning how to communicate and express yourself effectively to others,
- Learning how to look at situations differently,
- Developing coping statements to use at times when you are angry (these can help you to remain calm and focused),
- Taking time out from a situation, and
- Counting to ten is a common method people use to help manage their anger reactions.

Training programs can also be an effective strategy for learning to manage your anger reactions. If you would like further information or advice on individual counselling or small group programs available for anger management training please contact your local medical officer, psychologist, chaplain or Defence Community Organisation (DCO) (<http://www.defence.gov.au/dco/>) office.