

Patients - Anger

Anger and Irritability | Information for Parents

If you are a parent or parent-to-be, feeling angry and out of control may make you question your ability to care for another human being. From experience you know that such emotions eventually pass, but not before we have expressed rage or acted out in anger and behaved in unhealthy ways.

This document offers guidance and instruction to help you improve your mood, and help you in your role as a loving parent.

What does anger feel like?

Before anyone can deal with a problem, we need to accept that there is one. Here are examples of how you may feel when rage strikes.

- You blow things out of proportion.
- You wake up on the wrong side of the bed, irritable or angry for no reason.
- You promise never to let it happen again.
- You imagine bad things happening to someone who annoyed you.
- You scream, screech and swear, especially at someone who may not deserve it.
- You break or throw things.
- You may not remember what set you off or what you said or did after you became angry.
- After it's all over you may feel very ashamed and remorseful for your behavior.
- You feel overwhelmed by anger. No matter what you do, you cannot stop feeling it.
- You make a "mountain out of a molehill."
- You have aggressive thoughts and urges.
- You imagine hurting yourself or someone else.
- Physical symptoms appear: Headache, muscle tension, increased blood pressure and heart rate.

Sometimes anger, rage and irritability are the result of being hungry, tired and overwhelmed. Make sure that you address these needs, and eat or sleep when you feel the need.

Patient example

Licia, her partner Ari and their two-month-old baby live in their loft apartment. Ari's parental leave is complete, and Ari's office expects all employees to return to work. Licia cares for the baby all day long and is exclusively breastfeeding, so finding time to sleep or eat is difficult. Ari did not answer or return Licia's calls throughout the day. When Ari walked in the door, Licia handed the baby to Ari, grabbed her coat and left the loft. Ari tried to call Licia, but the calls went to voicemail. Licia returned three hours later when her breasts

were engorged, not saying anything to Ari.

What should you do?

The goal is for you to ensure your safety and the safety of those around you. The simplest thing to do is separate yourself from the person or activity that is making you feel so tense.

- Leave the place where you became upset.
- If you are alone at home with a child, you must safeguard him or her. Place the child in their crib or another safe place while you close yourself behind a door for 10-15 minutes.
- Do not drive a car, “Road rage” is a risk.
- If others are available to keep your family safe, step outside for a few minutes.

There will be times when you cannot get away. You may be at work, in a vehicle, or your presence may be required for another reason. In those situations, try to focus on something completely different than what originally upset you.

- Imagine something pleasant or amusing. (You may want to pre-plan your daydream.)
- Consider doing the opposite of what you feel. Breathe slowly; don’t hold your breath. Talk quietly; don’t yell. Stretch; do not clench your fists.

In your time away from the situation do something that you find calming and comforting. The following things can be done in under 10 minutes.

- Take a shower.
- Practice slow breathing
- Count to ten... or a thousand.
- Engage in positive self talk.
- Allow yourself time to cry.
- Listen to music.
- Meditate.
- Do some yoga exercises.

For some people, anger may become physical. You need to find a way to avoid hurting anyone. At the same time you need to release all that tension. As we noted above, it’s best to separate from the situation and distract yourself—but also burn off some negative energy in a safe manner. Some options:

- Throw a ball against a wall
- Punch or scream into a pillow
- Exercise or dance
- Tear up paper
- Put your hand in ice water for one minute

When to get more help

Rage and irritability are sometimes seen in people suffering from major depression, bipolar disorder, anxiety, and OCD.

Something is wrong if rage and irritability are your primary emotions. You need help if you have an urge to hurt yourself or someone else.

If you find yourself feeling angry and rageful more than normal, please talk to your health caregiver to determine if you would benefit from additional assistance.