

Expressing Anger

People are usually angry because they passionately want things to be different. Having a cancer diagnosis can bring up feelings of anger and you might need to learn to express your anger in positive ways. You may wonder where these feelings are coming from. Maybe you are angry at yourself and your body. You might be angry at god, another person or specific event. It can be helpful to talk to someone you trust and practice ways of calming yourself in the event of unpleasant situations. Like most skills the more you practice the easier it will get.

Recognize and attend to your anger:

Identify when you are feeling angry. Sometimes people may act out their anger even before realizing they are angry. Pay attention to your body, what is it saying to you? Is your breathing, muscle tension and heart rate increasing? Is your thinking logical and realistic? Do you usually act out by hitting or screaming?

Is anger masking other feelings?

Your anger may also be mixed with other distressful feelings such as fear, sadness or anxiety and/or your feelings may be triggered by physical pain or hunger

Discuss your feelings:

Choose someone from your circle of support that you can talk to about your feelings with on a routine basis. This could be a trusted family member, friend, or make an appointment with a Patient & Family Counsellor at your Cancer Centre.

Improve clear communication:

Try to improve lines of communication between person(s) you name as being linked to feelings of anger. This could involve, friends, family members, co-workers and members of your health care team.

Don't wait for anger to build-up:

Express your feelings in a healthy way as soon as you notice the anger. If you wait until your anger has built up you are more likely to express it in an unhealthy way.

Let go of anger energy in a positive way:

- Keep track of what triggers your angry feelings and how your body responds
- Cry or pound on a pillow
- Listen to calming music or watch your favorite movie
- Do a physical exercise or activity that matches the force of your feelings. You might say a negative feeling word as you throw rocks in a river or tear up written words on paper
- Do calming activities such as yoga, relaxation exercises (see our [Breathing Exercise & Progressive Muscle Relaxation handouts](#)), meditation, prayer, painting or journal writing to help manage stressors

Change your setting:

Stop and take a break! Take a brisk walk. Leave the person, place or thing that is raising your feelings of anger. Even a 5 minute walk can be useful in cutting the force of your feelings.

Build in quiet time:

When you expect something stressful to happen, give yourself some “quiet time” before and after. Quiet time before lets you to check in and do some planning. Quiet time after lets you release the feelings linked to stress.

Question your thinking:

When your feelings are high, your thinking can get exaggerated and overly dramatic. Try replacing these thoughts with more rational, real ones.

For instance: when you told your friend you were feeling very sick and she told you that there are people worse off than you. If your first thought was: "I hate you, I never want to see you again". Question your thoughts: "I am upset and my feelings are hurt." Try to express your hurt in productive way. Do this each time you feel anger getting the best of you, and it'll help you get a more balanced outlook.

Problem-solve:

Our anger and frustration can be caused by very real problems in our lives. Anger can be a normal response to needs not being met. **Ask yourself: “what do I want to do about it?”** Use your problem solving skills to gauge what changes you can make so your needs can be dealt with. (See our [“Problem-solving”](#) handout)