

Many women are surprised and dismayed by how uncharacteristically angry they get during the menopause transition. Unfortunately, fluctuating reproductive hormones contribute to this mood change.

Nevertheless, we are all familiar with anger, whether it is brief irritation or full rage. Anger is a normal, healthy emotion that helps us survive a threat. However, it becomes problematic if it gets out of control and starts hurting relationships or work. Unfortunately, chronic anger can also take its toll on health by causing an increased risk of high blood pressure and heart disease.

To avoid these negative outcomes, there are ways to reduce anger; including preventing yourself from becoming angry in the first place or controlling how you react to irritation that cannot be avoided.

Distancing yourself from the causes of your anger can help you avoid becoming angry at all. Start paying attention to what, where and who is involved when you get angry. As you become aware of your triggers, you can choose how to best avoid them. For example, if you start fuming every time you walk by the mess in your child's room, learn to close the door. Or, if your commute angers you, try leaving at a different time of day or driving a less congested/more scenic way. Being mindful of your body's signals when anger is building can also help to recognize anger sooner. As you feel your heart start to beat faster, your face start to flush or your temple start to pulse, you can learn to recognize your irritation early and leave the situation to give yourself a time out.

Because anger is not completely avoidable, you can also learn to control your reaction once you've come upset. Three main ways to deal with anger are to calm, to suppress and to express.

- 1) To **calm** yourself, learn relaxation techniques, such deep breathing. Adding in a repeated word or mantra, such "relax", and thinking of positive imagery, like a peaceful lake and palm trees, can also help derail the anger, preventing it from boiling over. Practicing these techniques daily allows you to use them easily and automatically when needed.
- 2) To **suppress** anger, redirect your attention to something positive. Beware that suppression alone can sometimes lead to unhealthy passive-aggressive behaviour (i.e. getting back at someone indirectly) or to a cynical or critical personality. However, distraction is still a valuable part of the anger management tool kit. Methods of distraction include:
  - a. Humor. This is not the same as superficially "laughing off" problems or being harshly sarcastic, because both of these are unhealthy. Instead, if you call someone a name, try thinking about what that literally looks like. Or when angry, think of yourself as a god or a ruler who owns everything and has her way all the time. The unreasonable nature of the scenario might help you smile instead.
  - b. Problem solving. Instead of dwelling on the source of your difficulty, focus on how you can work to make it better. Having a plan in place might help you feel less frustrated.

- 3) Lastly, learn to communicate better, so you can properly **express** yourself. The healthiest way to deal with your anger is to clearly convey what you are thinking. Be assertive and respectful, but not aggressive, while making your needs clear.
- a. Use more “I” statements. Rather than say “You never do any house cleaning”, say “I am frustrated that you left a pile of clothes on the floor this morning”. Blaming others increases anger and focusing on feelings instead tends to diffuse the situation.
  - b. Avoid using “never” or “always”. Thoughts born from anger are usually irrational, exaggerated or overly dramatic. When you think “This is horrible. Everything is completely ruined,” think instead “This is too bad. It makes sense that I’m upset, but it’s not the end of the world.” Asking yourself what most people would think in a similar situation helps you to reframe your ideas to something more reasonable.
  - c. Use “I would like” instead of “I must have”. Everyone likes to be right or have their way, but being less demanding with your language usually elicits a better response from others and helps to tone down your mood.

Unfortunately, for some, anger cannot be managed with simple tips. In fact, irritability and anger can sometimes be a sign of depression or anxiety. If your anger is often stronger than expected for the situation, if you are too frequently angry, if you act violently or if your anger is interfering with your job/loved ones/health, please seek out professional help through your family doctor or a counsellor.

#### RESOURCES

American Psychological Association. [www.apa.org/topics/anger/control.aspx](http://www.apa.org/topics/anger/control.aspx)

Canadian Mental Health Association. [www.cmha.ca](http://www.cmha.ca)

Mayo Clinic. <https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/adult-health/in-depth/anger-management/art-20045434?pg=2>

Positive Coping With Health Conditions. <http://www.comh.ca/pchc/workbook/pages/02-06-Skills-Anger.cfm>