



Ever threw your phone? “Rage quit” a video game? Punched a wall? Yelled when you shouldn’t have?

Anger can lead us to do some remarkably dumb things. When we feel a loss of control, or that our goals, desires, or freedoms are being attacked or thwarted (e.g. sitting in traffic, receiving criticism), our brains can interpret this as a threat to our safety or well-being. As a result, our **sympathetic nervous system** (i.e. stress response) takes action, raising our blood pressure and heart rate, producing agitation focused on the object of our anger. Under these conditions, we often feel compelled to act (e.g. “s/he made me do it!”), sometimes in wildly destructive or careless ways. In the heat of the moment, the impulse to *do something* can be completely overwhelming, making us feel our actions are justified, and preventing us from considering potential consequences. If we allow our brains to stew in a bath of stress hormones we’re more likely to leave passive-aggressive notes for coworkers, yell at our kids, guzzle alcohol...or punch walls.

This is not to say that anger can’t be healthy; after all, it’s a normal human emotion, and we have angry reactions for viable reasons. It’s what you *do* with that anger that makes all the difference:

- **Get control over your body.** Deal with the physiological arousal, first and foremost. Find a peaceful environment where you can assume a relaxed posture, and take a few minutes to focus on breathing deeply; try to slow down your breathing rate to a rhythmic 6-8 breaths/min.
- **Regain control over your mind.** Find a distraction. Engage in brief meditation. Use positive self-talk to remind yourself that you’re in control. Ask, “What’s causing my anger?”, “What’s more important, expressing my anger or achieving my goals?”
- **Avoid anger fuel.** If possible, separate yourself from the source of your anger, or at the very least try to limit exposure. Calmly inform others you need a break, return when cooled down.
- **Forget catharsis.** Taking out your anger on an inanimate object is more likely to perpetuate your rage than to abate it. And releasing anger onto another person won’t effectively relieve you of the feeling; you’re more likely to spread the ire to others (like an infectious disease).
- **Make anger work for you.** That hyped-up sensation can make you feel more strong and determined—so use it to your advantage! Let your anger power your exercise, or channel it into drive to produce excellent work. *Transfer the negative feeling into a positive product.*