

Coping with Anger [1]

This section has been reviewed and approved by the [Cancer.Net Editorial Board](#) [2], 08/2013

Key Messages:

- Anger is a common and natural response to living with cancer.
- The best way to deal with anger is to recognize it and find healthy ways to express it.
- Talk with a counselor or another member of your health care team if you are finding it difficult to cope with and express your emotions.

Anger is a common feeling for many people living with cancer. Although anger is often one of the first emotional reactions a person has to a cancer diagnosis, anger can develop at any time throughout treatment and survivorship. A person living with cancer may experience anger about the way cancer has disrupted his or her life or the way family members and friends reacted to the diagnosis. Many people wonder "Why me??", which can lead to feelings of anger and frustration. Also, cancer symptoms and treatment-related side effects, such as trouble sleeping, fatigue, pain, and nausea, can make even the most patient and optimistic person feel frustrated, irritable, and angry at times.

In general, people consider anger to be negative; however, it, like any other emotion, is something people just need to feel sometimes. Many people living with cancer feel guilty for being angry or simply don't know what to do to express their feelings. As a result, the person may internalize his or her feelings, which can lead to [depression](#) [3]. Some people try to cope with anger by abusing alcohol and drugs. Others express their anger uncontrollably, potentially putting both themselves and others at risk of harm.

However, if anger is expressed in a safe, positive way, it can be a source of power to help change things for the better. For example, anger about cancer may provide a person with the energy and strength needed to overcome the challenges of treatment.

Coping with anger

The best way to deal with anger is to identify it and find a healthy way to express it. Consider the following tips when you find yourself feeling angry:

Recognize your anger. It is important to identify when you are angry. Sometimes people act on their anger—for example, by yelling at their spouse—before they are fully aware that they are

struggling with the emotion.

Avoid taking out your anger on others. A person living with cancer may focus his or her anger about the disease on family and friends, which could drive away much needed support. It is important to direct your anger at the cause of the feelings, rather than other people.

Don't let anger mask other feelings. Your anger may also be mixed with other emotions. Anger is sometimes used to hide other painful feelings that are difficult or uncomfortable to express, such as sadness or hopelessness.

Don't wait for anger to build up. Express your feelings as soon as you recognize them. If you wait until your anger starts to boil over, you are more likely to express it in an unhealthy way.

Find a safe way to express your anger. There are a number of healthy ways to express and release your anger, including:

- Discussing the reasons for your anger with a trusted family member or friend
- Doing a physical activity while feeling your anger at its full intensity
- Beating on a pillow with your fists or a plastic bat
- Yelling out loud in a car or private room
- Exploring complementary therapies [4], such as massage, relaxation techniques, or music or art therapy

Consider counseling

If you find you are struggling to manage and express your anger in healthy ways, you could benefit from counseling [5], either one-on-one or in a group setting. A mental health counselor with experience working with people with cancer can help you identify what triggers your anger, avoid destructive responses, find healthy ways to express your feelings, and learn valuable coping skills. In addition, a counselor can help address related problems such as depression, addiction, and relationship issues. For help finding a counselor in your area who understands anger related to cancer, call the American Psychosocial Oncology Society (APOS) Helpline [6] at 1-866-276-7443 or explore these other support resources [7].

More Information

Emotional and Physical Matters
[8] [9]

Relationships and Cancer [9]

Coping With Uncertainty [10]

Coping With Guilt [11]

Additional Resource

National Cancer Institute: Your Feelings [12]

Links:

- [1] <http://www.cancer.net/coping-and-emotions/managing-emotions/coping-anger>
- [2] <http://www.cancer.net/about-us>
- [3] <http://www.cancer.net/node/25480>
- [4] <http://www.cancer.net/node/25011>
- [5] <http://www.cancer.net/node/24699>
- [6] <http://www.apos-society.org/survivors/helpline/helpline.aspx>
- [7] <http://www.cancer.net/node/25325>
- [8] <http://www.cancer.net/node/25109>
- [9] <http://www.cancer.net/node/25112>
- [10] <http://www.cancer.net/node/24493>
- [11] <http://www.cancer.net/node/24491>
- [12] <http://www.cancer.gov/cancertopics/takingtime/page2#3>