Coping with Anger [1]

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Anger is a common feeling for many people living with cancer. It is often one of the first emotional reactions a person has to a cancer diagnosis. But it can develop at any time throughout treatment and survivorship.

A person living with cancer may feel anger about the way cancer has disrupted his or her life. He or she may be angry about the way family members and friends reacted to the diagnosis. Many people also wonder ?Why me??, which can lead to feeling angry and frustrated. Cancer symptoms and treatment-related side effects, such as trouble sleeping, fatigue, pain, and nausea, can make even the happiest person feel frustrated, irritable, and angry at times.

Coping with anger

In general, people consider anger to be bad. But, like any other emotion, it is something people just need to feel sometimes. Many people living with cancer feel guilty for being angry or simply don't know how to express their feelings. As a result, the person may keep his or her feelings inside. Some people try to cope with anger by abusing alcohol and drugs. Others express their anger in ways that put both themselves and others at risk of harm. Continued anger and not feeling able to express it in healthy ways can lead to depression. Although depression is more common among people with cancer, it should not be considered a normal part of living with cancer. Learn more about the signs and symptoms of depression and how to find help [3].

When expressed in a safe, positive way, anger can help you 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.

Healthy ways to express 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.** Sometimes people act on their anger before they fully know that they are struggling with the emotion.
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Avoid taking out your anger on others. Direct your anger at the cause of the feelings, rather than other people.

- **Don't let anger mask other feelings.** People sometimes use anger to hide 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 hold them in, you are more likely to express anger in an unhealthy way.
- **Find a safe way to express your anger.** You can express and release your anger in a number of healthy ways, 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 therapies [4], such as massage, relaxation techniques, or music or art therapy

Consider counseling

If you find it hard 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 can help you identify what triggers your anger, avoid destructive responses, find healthy ways to express your feelings, and learn valuable coping skills. A counselor can also help evaluate whether chronic anger is contributing to clinical depression and help you address other related problems such as addiction and relationship issues. To find a counselor in your area who can help, call the American Psychosocial Oncology Society (APOS) Helpline [6] at 1-866-276-7443 or explore these other support resources [7].

More Information

Managing Emotions [8]

Talking With Family and Friends [9]

Coping with Uncertainty [10]

Coping with Guilt [11]

Additional Resource

National Cancer Institute: Taking Time: Support for People with Cancer [12]

Links:
[1] http://www.cancer.net/coping-with-cancer/managing-emotions/coping-with-anger
[2] http://www.cancer.net/about-us
[3] http://www.cancer.net/node/30346
[4] http://www.cancer.net/node/25011
[5] http://www.cancer.net/coping-with-cancer/finding-support-and-information/counseling
[6] https://www.apos-society.org/APOS/People_Affected_by_Cancer/Helpline/APOS/People_Affected_by_Cancer/Helpline.aspx
[7] http://www.cancer.net/node/30666
[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/publications/patient-education/taking-time