

Anger Doesn't Have To Be Unhealthy

By Jean Jeffers, Staff Writer

Shelly chips a tooth after having \$600 worth of work done on her teeth. She bombards her husband with her displeasure, and is late picking up the kids from school. Finally, she calls the dentist, makes an appointment, and asks for a financial plan.

After a breakup with her husband and pending divorce, Joyce develops colitis and has the time and expense of doctoring. She finally admits she is angry and makes an appointment with her counselor.

While hanging a picture frame with a hammer, Alice smashes her finger. When her husband gets home from playing golf, she's fuming and lets him have it, not making up until dinner.

Helen stays up too late watching a movie, is late for work the next day, and bungles a job. Her boss berates her, and angry at herself, she gets a headache and goes home early. The next morning she exercises before going to work.

After some trepidation, Laura asks for a raise from her boss who says maybe next year. She feels miffed as she puts it, turns in a report late, and takes a sick day when she is not ill. Soon, she lets go of the anger and gets back to a satisfactory performance.

Beatrice repeatedly says to herself that her husband is a jerk. He had been going out with his buddies one

night a week and this irritated her. Other than that, he was always attentive to her, helped with the kids, and was home every night. Yet she kept hearing herself replaying the theme of his being a jerk. It came to a head one night after he had come home from one of his evenings with the guys. Beatrice attacked him verbally, calling him names. Finally, after discussing her situation with a friend, Beatrice wrote a letter to her husband telling him of her concern. They talked about it, coming to a compromise.

What do all of these women have in common? They have been angry, have dealt with their anger in unhealthy ways, then have found more constructive expressions of their anger.

Anger may be a tough emotion to handle. It requires practice. Too often in the heat of the moment, words are expressed that are best left unsaid, or, as the vignettes indicate, other ways of handling anger play out. Anger can leave us with ill health or weaken our immune system.

Judy Ford, in her book, "Getting Over Getting Mad," says there are two sides to anger. "On the one side, anger is a nearly necessary emotion, which when used productively, allows us to develop ourselves and our relationships. On the other side, when anger covers up pain and fear, it clogs our energy, dilutes our joy, and keeps us off track, going in circles, making no headway. Instead of helping us, anger becomes self-defeating." Becoming aware of our anger, and recognizing it, is a giant first step toward being free.

Linda's anger has been building toward her husband for weeks. His late night working, his business travel, and his every week-end golf games with work buddies have become too much.

Linda hinted at her displeasure but nothing changed. Finally she decides to have a talk with her husband. One evening after the kids are in bed, she

approaches Stan. "Honey, there is something I would like to talk with you about. I know you have to work hard for your job, but lately I have felt kind of disregarded. I believe you are spending too much time with your work and not enough time with me and the kids. How can we work this out?"

Stan says he realizes things have gotten out of balance. He asks his wife to accompany him on the golf outings on weekends, agrees his assistant can do some of the travel and promises to be home for dinner each night.

Linda is relieved to hear this plan and feels better. Her headaches begin easing and her neck pain diminishes.

Linda has used a healthy expression of anger.

Jim is angry at a boss who fired him. He tends to take it out on his wife of twelve years. There is a rocky three months, after which the couple go for marriage counseling and Jim's anger surfaces. He comes to see the real reason for his anger and he decides to work on being forgiving of his former boss. He and his wife take an extended vacation and are okay with each other once again.

Jim has found the source of his anger and a way to let it go.

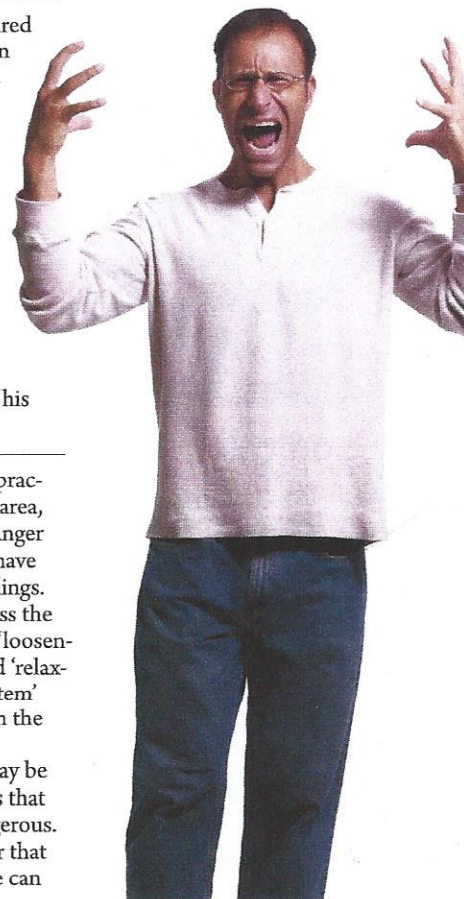
Ed Gutfreund, a counselor practicing in the Cincinnati, Ohio area, has this to say about anger: "Anger is a problem when we do not have adequate awareness of our feelings. When we recognize and express the anger appropriately, there is a 'loosening of the physical tension' and 'relaxation of the self-protective system' (fight or flight) associated with the feeling. We feel better."

Adds Gutfreund: "Anger may be healthy. It is there to inform us that something is irritating or dangerous. It is what we do with the anger that matters." He goes on to say, we can

express anger, or we can suppress it and store it in our body and hang onto it for years. Sometimes it is triggered much later and we erupt forcefully in situations where only a mild anger response is called for. Therefore, it is important to try to recognize when you are angry, what you are angry about, and try to deal with the anger in a healthy way.

About the Author

Jean is an RN with an MSN from University of Cincinnati. She writes freelance and is recently published in *Living Well -50Plus*, has articles in *Diabetes Health and Infinity Magazine*, and has a web site discussing medical issues on *The Examiner*, an online publication. She lives in Cincinnati.



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