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The Destructive Aspects of Anger

By Newton Hightower

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"We are here to encounter the most outrageous, brutal, dangerous and intractable of all passions; the most loathsome and unmannerly; nay, the most ridiculous too; and the subduing of this monster will do a great deal toward the establishment of human peace." –Seneca, Roman philosopher, 50 AD

Anger causes a bodily reaction. Your sympathetic nervous system and muscles mobilize for physical attack. Your muscles tense and your blood pressure and heart rate skyrocket. Your digestive processes stop. Certain brain centers are triggered, which then change your brain chemistry. When you are angry, your bodily functions change for the worse.

Dr. Charles Cole, Colorado State University, found that the physiological effects of anger can cause blood vessels to constrict, increase heart rate and blood pressure, and eventually lead to the destruction of heart muscle. After studying the reactions to stress and anger in more than 800 patients, Dr. Cole concluded that every thought has a physiological consequence.

Looking at the effects of anger, Dr. Leo Maddow, chairman of the Department of Psychiatry and Neurology at the University of Pennsylvania, observed that brain hemorrhages are usually caused by a combination of hypertension and cerebral arteriosclerosis. He found that anger can produce the hypertension which explodes the diseased cerebral artery, resulting in a stroke. Not only does anger produce physical symptoms ranging from headaches to hemorrhoids, it can also seriously aggravate already existing physical illnesses. "Someone who stays angry long after the particular incident that caused the anger may be committing slow suicide."

Each episode of anger or hostility sets off a physiological response in your body causing your heart to beat faster, your blood pressure to rise, your coronary arteries to narrow, and your blood to become thicker. When the blood becomes thicker, the heart has to work harder to pump it. For people with heart disease, this reaction can reduce blood flow to the heart, creating a potentially fatal condition.

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A study done by Dr. Ichiro Kawachi, of the Harvard School of Public Health, examined about 1,300 older men (average age of 62) over a seven-year period. Dr. Kawachi found that those men with the highest levels of anger were three times more likely to develop heart disease than men with the lowest levels of anger.

Other researchers at Union Memorial Hospital and Loyola College of Maryland in Baltimore interviewed 41 patients who just had angioplasties to unclog arteries. Those who scored highest in hostility (Hostile Type A) were 2.5 times more likely to need repeat angioplasty within the year. Furthermore, contrary to the common advice from friends and therapists to "get it all out" when angry, verbally berating partners or expressing hostility towards other people only serves to compromise physical health.

Newton Hightower is the Director of The Center for Anger Resolution, Inc. in Houston, Texas, and author of the new book "Anger Busting 101: New ABCs for Angry Men and the Women Who Love Them." Visit Newton's website for anger-busting ideas and a free email newsletter filled with guest articles and tips for husbands, wives, and therapists.

The Nature of Anger

By Kevin B. Burk, Author of The Relationship Handbook

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Many of us have some very definite ideas about anger. We see anger as destructive and hurtful. We consider it to be an inappropriate response. We equate anger with violence. In short, we feel that anger is simply wrong, and that when we experience anger, there's something wrong with us. Anger isn't nice. Anger isn't polite. And anger certainly isn't our friend.

Anger can be all of these things. But anger is also useful, necessary and even healing. We need our anger. We simply need to learn how to express our anger in appropriate, conscious, supportive ways. On its own, anger is neither good nor bad. It can be used to hurt, or it can be used to heal. It may not be a particularly pleasant emotion, but it's an important one. We can all benefit from exploring the nature of anger.

Guy Williams, a friend of mine who also happens to be a minister of Religious Science offers a tremendously insightful approach for understanding anger. Guy says that anger arises from a communication not delivered or an expectation not met. Anger is actually a tertiary response: our initial responses are grief and fear. First, we grieve the death of the expectation that was

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not met. Next, we fear that things will never change. Finally, we experience anger.

So few of us recognize that anger can be a positive, healing response. When we allow ourselves to experience anger, it focuses our minds, and strengthens our resolve. We discover reserves of strength and power. Our anger is what gives us the courage and the power to confront our fear that things will never change, by creating change.

Let's consider an example. We expect that our boundaries will be respected by others. When someone crosses a boundary, that expectation has not been met. The first thing we do is grieve the death of the expectation that other people will respect our boundaries. We feel unsafe because our boundary has been violated. But we also experience fear. We're afraid that things will never change: that our boundaries will not protect us because other people will not honor them. Our anger, however, is what allows us to change this. Our anger gives us the strength to defend ourselves. Our anger gives us the power and the

courage to stand up and demand that our boundaries be respected. Our anger, in fact, enables us to feel safe again. Expressing our anger helps us to redefine and reinforce our boundaries. We know we can defend ourselves, and therefore we feel safe.

When we don't express our anger in healthy, conscious ways, we buy into the fear that things will never change. We feel unsafe. More importantly, we expect that we will always feel unsafe. Unexpressed anger inevitably turns to resentment and depression.

Anger is our call to awareness. Our anger encourages us to become conscious of a limiting belief. The key to experiencing anger in a healing way is to own our anger. We can then choose how to express our anger. We do not need to lash out, nor do we need to hurt anyone with our anger. Instead, we can choose to alter our thinking, change the limiting belief, and reclaim another piece of our true selves. When we embrace and understand the true nature of anger, anger can empower us, and help us to feel truly safe.

Kevin B. Burk is the author of *The Relationship Handbook: How to Understand and Improve Every Relationship in Your Life*. Visit <http://www.everyrelationship.com> for a FREE report on creating AMAZING Relationships.

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