

calming the body

Because anger is part of our primitive fight-or-flight survival instinct, our bodies act like a sort of alarm system, warning us when there is a threat. It is important to develop awareness skills so that you know you are becoming angry before your anger completely takes over. When you are self-aware, you can more effectively use body-focused techniques to calm down.

19 noticing anger in your body

Anger has a strong physical component and can show up in different ways for different people. When you get angry, you may experience some of these reactions. Check off the ones that you experience when you get angry.

- Tightness in muscles
- Dizziness
- Heavy, fast breathing
- Racing heart
- Sweating palms
- Grinding your teeth
- Crying
- Feeling your face getting hot

Being aware of the bodily sensations related to your anger can be one of the best tools to help keep your anger from getting out of control. The earlier you notice yourself starting to get angry, the better your chance of choosing to do something else.

informal practice: noticing your rising anger

During the next week, try to notice what you feel in your body when you become angry. Pay close attention to your anger at all levels. See if you can notice the subtle sensations you experience when you start to feel irritated. How do these sensations change as your anger increases? Are there different body sensations with different types of feelings? For example, does your face get flushed when you argue, but your stomach get tight when you feel threatened? Rate your level of anger on a scale of 1 to 5, 1 being the lowest and 5 the highest.

Date	Level of Anger	Sensations

20 your anger alarm

Anger serves as a natural alarm system. It may seem that anger erupts out of nowhere, like a volcano. But there are often early signs that anger is starting to build. These early signs can be thoughts, subtle feelings, or bodily sensations. We usually pay little attention to these. But when our anger has reached a dangerous level, it is often too late to control it. The better we become at noticing early signs, the better chance we have of making other choices to cool our anger.

This completed anger alarm chart can give you an idea of how thoughts, feelings, and bodily sensations rise up and intensify.

Level	Color	Thoughts	Feelings	Bodily Sensations
1	Blue	<i>I want to be left alone. Shut up.</i>	Annoyed	Tightness in chest Restlessness
2	Green	<i>I want to tell you off. Get away from me.</i>	Irritated	Jaw clenched Headache
3	Yellow	<i>Don't mess with me. I'm hurt and want to hurt someone else.</i>	Pissed off	Heart racing Face flushed Voice raised
4	Orange	<i>I can't believe you did that. I'm going to hurt someone. I hate you.</i>	Angry	Fist clenched Yelling Crying
5	Red	<i>I want to hit someone. I hate the world.</i>	Enraged	Heart pounding Shaking

exercise: identifying your anger alarms

Use the chart below to identify the different signals of your anger, from the earliest signs that you are getting upset to a full-blown explosive rage. You can use numbers from 1 to 5 to identify the different levels of your rising anger. Or you can visualize colors, like an alarm system going from blue to green to yellow to orange to red. Use whichever works to help you identify the different levels of your anger as it builds. Try to write down the thoughts, feelings, and bodily sensations that go with each level of your anger.

Level	Color	Thoughts	Feelings	Bodily Sensations
1	Blue			
2	Green			
3	Yellow			
4	Orange			
5	Red			

21 STOP

STOP (Stop, Take a breath, Observe what is happening in your body, Proceed) is a helpful tool that you can use anywhere. You can practice when you are bored or impatient. Or you can use this tool when you are annoyed and angry; for example, before you reply to an irritating text from your parent. When you use STOP, you can tolerate a greater range of feelings and relate to yourself and others with greater flexibility and openness.

informal practice: using STOP

At least a couple of times a day for a week, try practicing STOP at different times and in different situations, when things are calm, or when they get intense: Stop, Take a breath, Observe what is happening in your body, and Proceed.

Write your observations down in your journal. Were you more aware of your thoughts, feelings, and body sensations? If so, did this increased awareness affect how you reacted to situations?

breathing through anger 22

When we are in the middle of difficult emotions such as anger and fear, remembering to breathe through them can be challenging. But these few easy instructions can help: *relax, observe, allow*. Relax when you notice warning signs of anger in your body, such as tightness in the chest, a flushed face, or shallow breathing. Then observe: what is happening? Allow yourself to feel any emotions that may be beneath the surface of your anger. Each time you encounter an anger invitation, you can choose a different way to respond rather than react.

informal practice: relax, observe, allow

When you notice anger and other intense feelings rising, use this mindfulness exercise to breathe through the emotion.

- When you notice the warning signs of your anger, tell yourself to *relax*. Allow your body to relax. As you breathe in, count to four, and as you breathe out, count to six. Repeat: four in-breaths, six out-breaths. Feel your body relax and let go of tension.
- *Observe* what is happening while you relax. Stop thinking about why you are upset and simply allow the breath to rise and fall. Breathe in, breathe out. Ask yourself, *What is happening inside me right now?* Observe your bodily sensations.
- *Allow* yourself to feel the emotions that may be beneath your anger. Don't try to avoid them or cover them with anger. Just allow them to pass through you.

Try to envision your feelings as ice. Let the ice turn to water and the water to mist. With each breath, repeat: *relax, observe, allow*.

activity 22 ✿ breathing through anger

This mindfulness practice can prevent you from blowing up and causing more problems. It can also help you identify what is under the anger. All feelings are valid when you relax into what is happening within you and observe without reacting or avoiding. Feelings arise and pass away pretty quickly if we just allow them to pass through the mind and body. What was once an angry episode that would have caused much suffering for you and others can pass in minutes. This can help you to have more control over your feelings and more control over your life.

body scan 23

Our emotions are felt and experienced in our bodies. Intense emotions like anger and fear trigger body reactions that we may not even notice at times. Our bodies can also send us signals that inform us about how we are feeling even before our minds are aware of those feelings.

The goal of the body scan meditation is to simply become aware of the sensations in your body. Developing body awareness can be a powerful step toward accepting our feelings and reducing our impulsive reactions. You do not need to try to relax or change how you feel. You should not try to avoid difficult or unpleasant sensations. The goal is to become aware. Accept what you are feeling in different parts of your body. As you develop more awareness, you will notice how sensations come and go, how body sensations are always changing. Just like emotions, our physical sensations keep changing. If we let them be as they are, we are one step closer to deeper awareness and acceptance.

The body scan meditation has proven to be helpful for dealing with stress, physical pain, and sleep difficulties. This simple practice can be an important step in learning to cope with difficult emotions like anger, sadness, or anxiety.

formal practice: body scan meditation

The written instructions below are a simplified version of the full guided meditation that can be downloaded at <http://www.newharbinger.com/29163>. We recommend that you listen to the audio recording to get the full benefits of this meditation.

During this meditation, you will focus on the sensations of the body within the body. Start with the breath as an anchor. Scan through the body, exploring sensations as they arise. Body scanning is like a mental X-ray. By bringing awareness to each part of the body, you can tune in to layers of sensation.

Get started with these basic steps. Pause for about five breaths between each step.

- Get into a comfortable position (sitting or lying down). Shut your eyes if you like.
- Focus awareness on the breath. Breathe in ... breathe out. Notice the rise and fall of your belly like a balloon inflating and deflating.
- Feet
Bring awareness to whatever is felt in your feet: coolness, warmth, tingling, dryness. Notice whatever sensation is felt in this part of your body.
- Legs
Scan up your legs: ankles, calves, thighs, and up to your hips. Bring awareness to what is felt.
- Hips, abdomen, torso
Feel into your skin, muscles, and the organs beneath.
- Lower, then upper back
Scan one vertebra at a time. Notice your ribs expand with each breath. Notice your heartbeat.

- **Shoulders**
Gradually move down your arms, wrists, and hands. Extend awareness down to the tips of your fingers, then back up to your neck.
- **Face**
In rings of awareness, move up your head, sensing into your jaw, your cheeks, your skull. Move through your chin, jaw, mouth, nose, cheeks, ears, and eyes. Notice what you feel in these places.
- **Head**
Move from your forehead to the crown of your head, then down to the back of your head and neck.
- **Whole body**
Expand awareness to your entire body, from toes to fingertips to top of the head. Breathe in, breathe out, feeling your entire body.

Body Scan Tips

- You may feel uncomfortable or unpleasant sensations, like itchiness or pain. Without avoiding or judging, allow these sensations to be.
- Notice how sensations pass and change when you allow them to be.
- If you get distracted, notice it, and then gently bring attention back to the body.
- Use the breath as an anchor when your attention wanders. Breathe in, and then come back to the body scan.

24 distraction

When your anger is building, and you feel unable to direct your awareness to what you are feeling without acting impulsively, distraction can help. The goal of distraction is to take your mind and heart away from what is upsetting you, and it can be a healthy coping strategy. Next time you feel your anger rising, try the following strategies to calm your body and reach emotional balance.

Distraction can take different forms, and you may find that particular forms work best for you or for certain types of situations. It is important to use the strategies that work, and also to keep them fresh by trying new distractions at times. Remember to use these strategies to distract yourself, not to try to fix the problem.

Here's a brief explanation of some different types of distraction:

activity 24 ✿ distraction

Type of Distraction	What It Involves	Ideas
Change of Feelings	Activities that improve your mood	Listen to upbeat music. Watch an uplifting movie or TV show. Look at pictures of happy times in your life.
Mental Distraction	Activities that keep your thoughts occupied	Play a game on your smartphone. Read a good book. Learn about something online.
Physical Activities	Activities that help you expend energy in positive ways	Jog or go for a walk. Dance. Do yoga.
Connection	Activities that involve spending time with others (but not ruminating over whatever is upsetting you)	Call someone. Write an e-mail or letter. Meet a friend for lunch.
Humor	Activities that lower the emotional intensity of a situation and help you focus on the lighter side of life	Watch a funny video. Read online humor content.
Creativity	Activities that help you express yourself	Write a story or poem. Draw or paint. Work with clay.

skill practice: distraction strategies

In your journal, create a list of effective distraction strategies for you. How were you feeling before engaging in the distraction? How did you feel afterward? Were you better able to respond rather than react to the upsetting situation?

grounding 25

Intense feelings like anger and fear can cause you to feel out of control. You may lose the ability to think clearly, or you may have a flushed face, a racing heart, and rapid breathing. When you feel overwhelmed by intense feelings, you can use these strategies to help ground yourself in your body and your immediate surroundings. Try to do these activities mindfully, which means staying in the present moment and remaining nonjudgmental.

Grounding Strategies	
Hold a piece of ice.	Count backward from twenty.
Take a hot shower.	Snap a rubber band on your wrist.
Name objects in the room.	Eat mindfully.
Count your breaths in and out.	Walk mindfully.
Watch clouds.	Touch your toes.
Splash cold water on your face.	Use the STOP tool.
Name what you are doing.	Notice your body sensations.

skill practice: grounding strategies

Try different grounding strategies and write down how effective each one was in your journal. Use the questions below to guide your reflections.

- How were you feeling before the grounding activity? What were your sensations and thoughts?
- How did you feel afterward?
- How were you able to move forward to handle what was in front of you?

self-soothing 26

Your body may be very stressed from handling so much anger. Finding ways to soothe yourself can ease the tension and allow you to feel more calm and relaxed. Try to engage your different senses when using self-soothing strategies. Treat yourself to some of these strategies, and create a list of your favorites.

Self-Soothing Strategies

Play calming music.	Consciously relax your body, one part at a time.
Take a hot bath or shower.	Go out in nature.
Light incense or heat scented oils.	Pick fresh flowers.
Cook a tasty meal.	Take a nap.
Slowly eat something you really like.	Look at artwork.
Relax with a movie or book.	Get a massage.