

4 Health Dangers of Anger

The Bible has a lot to say about anger. It tells us that fools give “full vent” to their anger, but wise people keep themselves under control.

It encourages us not to be quickly provoked because anger “resides in the lap of fools.” Proverbs 14:29 teaches us that patient people have great understanding, “but people with tempers show their foolishness” (NCV). With the tools and knowledge of modern science, we are beginning to see the adverse health effects of anger within the bodies of the “foolish” and “hot-tempered.”

Thankfully, however, we have God’s word to serve as a living, active antidote for the ailments of body and soul. It contains the wisdom and power to completely cleanse our bodies of toxic emotions and nourish them with fruits of patience, gentleness, and self-control.

When we think of “anger,” we often envision red-faced cartoon characters with steam jetting out of their ears to the sound of a teakettle or locomotive whistle. If you’re like me, you grew up watching TV shows like “Dennis the Menace” and “Family Matters,” and you might picture Mr. Wilson or Carl Winslow blowing a fuse in the wake of Dennis or Steve Urkel’s mischievous or clumsy behavior.

What you might not envision is what anger looks like on the *inside*, which is what this article is all about.

Here are four of the dangers anger presents to our bodies:

1. Increases risk of heart disease. Forty-four studies published last year in the *Journal of the American College of Cardiology* found evidence of a link between emotions and heart disease. The same study also showed that chronically angry or hostile adults with no history of heart trouble might be 19

percent more likely than their more easygoing peers to develop heart disease. Some doctors now consider anger a heart disease risk factor that can be modified, just as people can lower their cholesterol or blood pressure.

Scientists speculate that stress hormones that are activated by anger, such as adrenaline and cortisol, speed up your heart rate and breathing and cause your blood pressure to rise and blood vessels to constrict. While this stress response mobilizes you for emergencies, it might cause harm if activated repeatedly.

Frequent anger “causes wear and tear on the heart and cardiovascular system,” says Jerry Kiffer, MA, a heart-brain researcher at the Cleveland Psychological Testing Center. An overworked heart, constricting blood vessels, and surging blood pressure can cause damage to artery walls.

2. Damages the liver and kidneys. The frontal lobe of our brains serves an important role in controlling rage. It helps suppress socially unacceptable responses and choose between good and bad behavior. If you’re continuously provoked by anger-inducing triggers, then this state of response can begin to cause a decrease in the production of acetylcholine, a hormone that tempers the severe side of adrenaline. The nervous system becomes overexerted, which leads to a weakened heart, stiffer arteries, as well as liver and kidney damage.

CRP, or C-reactive protein, is a substance known to promote heart disease and stroke and is produced in higher levels within people prone to anger. In a 2005 edition of the journal *Arteriosclerosis, Thrombosis, and Vascular Biology*, Israeli researchers found that elevations of liver enzymes correlate with higher CRP concentrations. Since liver enzymes typically rise in the presence of liver inflammation and liver damage, elevated CRP levels could be indicative of a worsening of liver disease.

3. Fuels depression. Research published in the journal *JAMA Psychiatry* found that overt irritability and anger were present in about 54 percent of the 500 patients who participated in a U.S. National Institute of Mental Health study on depression. The researchers found that irritability and anger in these patients were associated with significantly more severe depression and longer-lasting depression. The two emotions also were associated with poorer impulse control, higher rates of lifetime substance abuse, more antisocial personality disorders, reduced life satisfaction, and a higher rate of bipolar disorder in relatives.

4. Slows the body's healing process. "A cheerful heart is good medicine." Science has proved Solomon's words to be absolutely true by showing how angry outbursts impact the healing process. Researchers at the University of Ohio in Columbus inflicted minor burns on the forearms of 98 volunteers who were then monitored over eight days to see how quickly the skin repaired itself. The subjects had each taken a battery of psychological tests beforehand to assess how easily and often they felt and expressed wrath, and were then ranked on an "anger scale."

The results indicated that individuals who had trouble controlling expressions of anger were four times more likely to need more than four days for their wounds to heal, compared with counterparts who could master their anger.

All of this information begs the question: How do we deal with anger? James 1:19 offers succinct and yet tremendously powerful insight:

"You must all be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to get angry" (NLT).

Reasons to feel rage abound in this world of sin-born darkness and Christ-born light, reasons that range from blatant bullying at your child's school to passive-aggressive statuses

flooding your Facebook newsfeed. Anger is a natural, normal emotion to feel. Ephesians 4:26 says that when—not “if”—we become angry, we shouldn’t sin. Clearly, anger in and of itself is not a sin.

Jesus, who was absolutely sinless, became angry when He saw merchants buying and selling inside the holy Temple. And He didn’t merely shake His finger in chastisement and then politely ask them to take their crooked business elsewhere. On the contrary, He forcefully overturned the tables and benches and drove the money-hungry out. He did this to clear the way for worship and provide a sacred space for the healing of the blind and lame. His anger wasn’t rooted in selfishness, as much of our anger is, but rather, in godliness. He witnessed injustice and sacrilege and took action against it. From this example, we learn that anger can be a helpful emotion when it alerts us to threatening or unjust situations.

Notice James didn’t write “don’t get angry.” He said be “slow” to get angry. When you feel anger rising within you, ask yourself if you’ve listened to the full story. One of the most foolish things we can do in sensitive situations and volatile conversations is speak prematurely before we’ve heard as much of the complaint, accusation, story, even lie as the other party is willing to offer. Then, after you’ve heard everything, ask the Holy Spirit to give you the right words to speak and the proper tone with which to speak them. How many of you know that an acerbic tone or display of dismissive, disrespectful body language can transform seemingly innocent words into inflammatory barbs. With the Spirit’s peace and presence prompting you, you can defuse a verbal bomb before it detonates. You can save relationships and even your physical health. Most of all, you can reflect the love, patience, and gentleness of Jesus.

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