



## Managing anger after brain injury - tips for brain injury survivors

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### Introduction

This factsheet contains tips for brain injury survivors who experience more anger after their brain injury and have difficulties with managing this. The tips have been taken from the Headway booklet *Managing anger after brain injury*, which is available on the Headway website at [www.headway.org.uk/information-library](http://www.headway.org.uk/information-library).

There are two reasons why it is important to control your anger:

1. It can lead to aggressive or impulsive behaviour
2. It can affect your thinking and speaking

All our skills work best when we are calm. As your anger increases, it can affect how you receive information, your memory and how well you speak. This can lead to you becoming frustrated and perhaps even angrier. If you already have problems in any of these areas, your anger will only make them worse.

### Tips for managing anger

The following tips can help with identifying and managing anger. Remember that different things work for different people, so while some of the tips below may be helpful to you, others may be less effective, and it is a matter of finding what works best for you.

- Remove yourself from the situation. This is not always easy and you may not like the idea of walking away because it can be seen as 'backing down'. However, physically distancing yourself from the source of anger is the first step to managing your anger effectively, as it allows you to calm your body and thoughts before you deal with things.
- Remember that if you are calm, you will be able to deal with your problems and explain yourself to others. Try to take time out to decide if it is something worth dealing with. If so, plan your response calmly. Then decide if it is worth getting angry over. If not, let it drop.
- Write down how you are feeling when you are angry. You can show this to someone you trust later and discuss the reason you felt anger, what you did



- about it, and what can be done next time to prevent you from getting angry again.
- Think about using other ways to calm yourself down, such as listening to relaxing music or writing a poem.
- Practice relaxation and breathing exercises.
- Think of someone who normally calms you down when you feel yourself getting angry. What might they say to you if they were there? Or think of a special, calming place, piece of music, or picture. Try to make this part of a routine that you can use regularly to help you cope.
- Learn to appreciate just how powerful your thoughts are. Remember that they are automatic and something you really believe, so they can make you angry when there is actually no real reason.
- Remember that it is only your interpretation of a trigger (situation) that makes you angry. You may be right, but always think about other interpretations first.
- Practice noticing or self-monitoring how tense and angry your body is feeling. Then relax and see the difference. You will then be able to measure how angry you are, when compared to how you feel when relaxed.
- Try to notice the warning signs of your anger - shoulders rising up, breathing faster, clenched fists, etc. Remove yourself from situations when you feel those warning signs.
- Write down which ideas have helped. This will help you in the future if you have a 'bad patch'.
- Consider seeking professional support if you are struggling with managing anger. For more information, see the Headway booklet *Managing anger after brain injury*.

## Physical activity

Some people believe that they must do something physical to let their anger out. However, while punching a punch bag is better than punching another person, it may cause problems. It will use up some adrenaline, but the thoughts that caused the anger will not have changed. You need to consider what you would do when the punch bag isn't there.

If you do need to do something physical while angry then activities such as running, swimming and gardening can help. However, the problem is still that exercise itself does not take away the angry thoughts. It is important to try and slow down towards the end of the activity in order to allow your body to relax. You will then be more likely to be able to think things through clearly.



## Conclusion

Problems with managing anger are common after brain injury. For many brain injury survivors with anger problems, becoming aware of the anger is the first step to managing it. The tips in this factsheet can help you to both identify and manage your anger effectively, although it may be necessary for you to seek professional support as well.

**To discuss any issues raised in this factsheet, or to find details of our local groups and branches, please contact the Headway helpline free of charge on 0808 800 2244 (Monday - Friday, 9am-5pm) or by email at [helpline@headway.org.uk](mailto:helpline@headway.org.uk).**

You can also find more information and contact details of groups and branches on our website at [www.headway.org.uk/supporting-you](http://www.headway.org.uk/supporting-you).

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