

What is your anger IQ?



It's the age of outrage, so you're not alone if you're feeling more irritable or aggressive than usual. But you can manage your kneejerk reactions. **Jaymie Hooper** takes you through a crash course in keeping your cool

You probably don't need a checklist of natural disasters, once-in-a-lifetime medical emergencies, economic contractions or social uprisings to know that there is a lot to be angry about in 2020 – which has reached a point where even the most level-headed among us have become familiar with the hot rush of rage.

"The world is very stressed right now and there's a lot of unease," explains Dr Celin Gelgec, a clinical psychologist and director of Melbourne Wellbeing Group. "When uncertainty is high, we can feel a whole lot of emotions, and anger is certainly one of them."

Patrick Dixon, a psychologist at The Indigo Project agrees. He tells *Body+Soul*, "Key social and political issues have caused outrage internationally and there's a sense of frustration. Add to this the increased uncertainty that comes with COVID-19 and a platform for problematic anger opens up."

It is, of course, acceptable to feel angry some of the time; it's an emotion like any other. But it is neither healthy nor productive if it remains the only way you feel. "We simply don't have the capacity to take on every single issue that arises – so we shouldn't try to," notes BBC broadcaster Ashley 'Dotty' Charles, whose new book *Outraged* (Bloomsbury, \$39.99) explores how the age of agitation has put civil discourse on a path to extinction. "Outrage is subjective, so just because something has provoked someone else doesn't mean that it will elicit a similar feeling in you."

When it comes to living a happy, healthy life, the experts agree that being able to control your anger is key. So what do you do when you can't?

WHAT IT MEANS TO BE ANGRY

Let's get one thing straight – anger isn't a dirty word. In fact, in certain cases, it can be downright helpful.

"Anger can help you stay safe and alive," says Dixon. "If you're under attack, anger kicks in to provide you with that extra bit of energy to keep you out of harm's way. It also works like a vantage point for your moral compass – it lets you know when something has happened that goes against who you are and what you stand for."

The problem with anger lies in the fact that it's driven by impulse. Activated by your amygdala – the part of your brain responsible for emotion – anger is often

triggered without question or consideration, and this can cause you to act on perceived injustices even when they aren't exactly valid.

How your anger presents itself depends largely on whether or not you internalise or externalise it. "When people internalise anger, they can often experience physical symptoms such as a clenched jaw, frequent headaches and stomach aches, and they also exhibit passive-aggressive behaviour, such as being irritated or disagreeable," explains Dr Gelgec. "When you externalise anger, you're likely to raise your voice often and even experience the urge of wanting to hit or punch something."

CALCULATING YOUR ANGER IQ

For both Dixon and Dr Gelgec, anger – whether internal or external – becomes problematic when it causes conflict within your relationships and leaves you feeling distressed. "When anger is on the higher end of intensity, out of proportion to the situation, occurs frequently and is difficult to control, it's considered a problem," says Dixon. "Behaviours associated with problematic anger include frequent verbal aggression, like swearing and screaming, physical violence towards yourself and others, constant interpersonal difficulties, arguments, bullying and harassment."

If you identify with any of the above behaviours, it may indicate that you have an anger problem, in which case Dr Gelgec recommends you talk about it with a professional. Investigating and keeping track

of your emotions can also help identify whether or not you have a problem; by writing down your reactions, you'll better understand your triggers and the frequency with which your anger occurs.

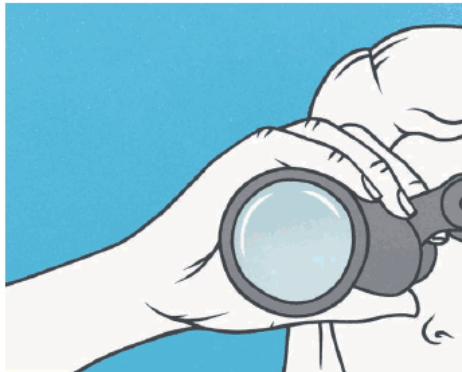
"Spend five minutes a day reflecting on your daily schedule and taking note of any moments that made you angry," tips Dixon. "You can also jot down the intensity of the emotion from zero to 10 – with 10 being the angriest – as well as any physical sensations you experience."

HOW TO MASTER YOUR MOODS

By taking the time to reflect on your triggers and reactions, you'll gain insight into how your anger manifests, which can help you learn to control it. For example, if you usually feel hot in the face just before you yell, you may learn to question whether the coming reaction is warranted. "It's important to learn how to express anger in a healthy manner, because if you don't, it can be disruptive and harmful to both yourself and the meaningful relationships you have," explains Dr Gelgec.

As well as creating short-term issues, Dixon notes that difficulty managing your anger can also lead to longer-term – and more serious – problems such as "higher levels of anxiety and depression, and physical health implications like high blood pressure and heart disease".

Need help controlling your anger reactions? Try Dixon's five-step plan:



1. INVESTIGATE YOUR ANGER

Instead of ignoring your anger, or trying to suppress it, Dixon says it can be more helpful to approach it with curiosity. "Allowing space for and analysing anger can reduce its intensity," he explains. "Ask yourself: where do you feel it in your body? How big is the feeling? How deep within your body is it? What shape is it? Then breathe deeply into the shape, while reminding yourself that it will pass soon enough."

2. TAKE A BREATH

Breathe slowly and deeply rather than taking shallow breaths. "Deep breathing can mitigate the effects of your fight-or-flight response and activate the calming rest-and-digest response. Apps such as Calm and Headspace are great in guiding these deep-breathing techniques."

3. DO THE OPPOSITE

Take a moment to assess whether or not your anger is unhelpful, like if you feel like screaming at someone or becoming violent. Then do the opposite. "This technique is a Dialectical Behaviour Therapy strategy that helps with managing difficult emotions such as anger," explains Dixon. "The opposite of anger could be compassion, so consider a compassionate interpretation of the situation."

4. NOURISH YOUR BODY

Exercising, eating well and feeling rested can also help. So make sure you work out at least three times a week, make healthy food choices and set up your bedtime routine for restful sleep.

5. LET IT OUT

Bottling up your anger will only lead to an outburst, so Dixon suggests releasing your anger in a cathartic way. "Perhaps scream into a pillow or yell along to your favourite song. Do whatever allows your anger to flow through you, as long as the action is true to your values." o



The headlines are hectic, and constantly refreshing them will make your brain feel the same. Author Ashley 'Doty' Charles has a few tips to help you stop scrolling for scares

Edit your timeline

"You need to curate positive online experiences and have a greater awareness of what you allow into your realm. This means limiting your access to 'doomsday' news, unfollowing profiles or pages that thrive on toxic content, muting Twitter conversations when they no longer serve you and blocking accounts that routinely disrupt your peace."

Stop catastrophising

"The internet has the ability to make things seem far worse than they are. Everything seems louder, scarier and more offensive online because we exist in echo chambers that raise the volume of every conversation. Take a step back and ask yourself whether some things are as bad as the internet is making them out to be."

Log out

"Social media is a buffet. Take what you like, leave what you don't... then get the hell out of there."