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## Spotlight on Health



### 5 Ways to Derail Rage

By Sarah Reistad-Long

For the third time now, the hardware store clerk has brought you the wrong light bulb, maybe because she still hasn't gotten off her @#! cell phone. Bad service isn't a crime, but it sure can make you want to commit one, as can any number of daily irritants (being cut off on the highway, just missing the train). Americans report losing their temper on average three to four times a week, according to Raymond W. Novaco, Ph.D., the University of California, Irvine, Psychology and Social Behavior Professor who coined the term "Anger Management" in 1975. To cool down fast:

**1. Call it:** The minute you feel your temperature rise, tell yourself, "I'm bothered, and that may blur my judgment," Novaco suggests.

**2. Don't wait to inhale:** Each of us has a unique anger threshold based on chemicals like serotonin, says Emil F. Coccaro, M.D., Chairman of the Department of Psychiatry & Behavioral Neuroscience at the University of Chicago, where he runs an aggression research lab. Depending on the kind of day you're having, your arousal varies, and when it's high, it's easier to explode.



Regular exercise and relaxation practices can help you lower your arousal level and, in turn, stay below your breaking point so you're more immune to rude remarks and other daily aggravations. If you do feel yourself getting worked up, just start breathing deeply to calm down, immune to rude remarks and other daily aggravations. If you do feel yourself getting worked up, just start breathing deeply to calm down: Imagine the breath going in and out through your heart while thinking about something in your life with appreciation, suggests Deborah Rozman, Ph.D., a California psychologist and co-author of *Transforming Stress: The HeartMath Solution for Relieving Worry, Fatigue, and Tension*, who has successfully tested this approach in clinical trials. After just five cycles, your system should be back to a more emotionally balanced, even keel.

**3. Note to self:** “I’m great.” At the root of anger is self-doubt – a salesperson’s incompetence doesn’t throw you into a rage unless you’re feeling helpless, harried, overextended, or otherwise victimized – says Steven Stosny, Ph.D., a Maryland anger specialist who has treated more than 6,000 people and written *You Don’t Have to Take It Anymore*. So as soon as you start bristling, turn your mind to whatever or whoever makes you feel good about yourself – an achievement, future goals, a pet – as long as it has nothing to do with the issue at hand. The quick shift in focus can snap you out of a temper flare.

**4. Think of something funny:** If you’re already in a full-throttle rage, you can startle yourself out of it with humor, says Cocco. One old trick is to imagine the person who’s enraging you standing there “buck naked” – maybe they even slip on a banana peel or get a pie thrown in their face. Another standby is to remember your favorite comedic moment (*I Love Lucy* in the candy factory? Jerry Seinfeld yada-yada-yada-ing? Chris Rocks’ last concert? Any 2-year-old eating a cupcake?).

**5. Clear your mind:** At high levels of arousal, thinking gets fuzzy (attention narrows, and we’re operating from our primitive fight-or-flight instinct). To cut through the fog, have questions ready to ask yourself, Stosny suggests: If there’s an aggressor, what are at least two reasons this person might be acting out? In a traffic jam acknowledge the frustration of the situation with a quick mental note – “So here we are” – and then jump to “How am I going to get on with it?”