

## Anger and Mental Health

Does losing your temper mean you have a mental health problem? Not necessarily. Anger is a normal human emotion which can cue us that there is a problem to be solved and give us the energy and focus to solve it. Tennis player John McEnroe used to win more points after he got angry. Apple founder Steve Jobs was an inveterate rager, but his intensity was crucial in driving employees to achieve great things. People around these guys may have developed mental health problems (mostly anxiety disorders!), but their anger often served them well. On the other end of the spectrum, the meek child allowing herself to get angry at a friend who is mistreating her, could help her to set healthy boundaries.

Even though anger is often a healthy emotion, there are instances where anger can be a symptom of a mental health problem. Chronic anger or hostility may indicate a problem. Chronic anger generates the hormone cortisol in the body and can cause cardiovascular disease. This damage happens whether the anger is expressed or internalized, it only has to be felt inside.

Anger sometimes is a sign of a more serious mental health problem. Anger may be a symptom of depression or bipolar disorder, especially in men. A person who is developing a thought disorder and is feeling persecuted may be expressing anger in reaction to an imagined threat. Certain brain injuries can cause a loss of emotional control and lead to rage reactions. Chronically jealous or controlling people may use anger as a way of managing their own fear by intimidating another person. This may reflect an enduring personality flaw caused by early life experiences.

If you are concerned about your anger or if important people in your life are expressing concern, it may be a good idea to consult with your doctor who may suggest a further consult with a mental health practitioner such as a psychiatrist or a psychologist. There are very effective talk therapies to help people with anger problems. In certain cases medication may also be helpful.

Oh yes, and if you are driving anywhere in Vancouver, make sure you take some deep breaths first!

*Dr. Jim Browning is a Registered Psychologist in West Vancouver - <http://www.jimbrowning.ca/>*

*The CMHA, North and West Vancouver Branch is a non-profit organization dedicated to empowering, supporting and improving the quality of life of mental health consumers and increasing the overall wellness of the North Shore community - <http://northwestvancouver.cmha.bc.ca/>*