Managing Depression When Sadness Feels Like Anger

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Managing Anger and Depression

Depression has classical symptoms: sadness, low energy, sleep problems, loss of interest and so on. However, for some depressed people, anger be the strongest emotion experienced.

It is Easier to Be Angry

The reason some depressed people feel anger instead of sadness is that they may suppress their sad feelings. They refuse to feel sad, and they fight depressive symptoms to the point that it makes them angry.

They are angry at situations and people that have made them feel helpless and hopeless. Sadness hurts, and sometimes, it is just easier to be angry.

Is Anger a Symptom of Depression?

We all experience anger at some point in our lives. For some people, however, that anger lingers, and it can be a sign of depression.

In fact, researchers know there is a connection between anger and depression. One study going back almost 20 years from researchers at Massachusetts General Hospital, Boston, Massachusetts, finds that a third of depressed persons also experience anger attacks, as a symptom of depression.

And anger worsens the severity of depression and makes treatment and coping harder. In fact, in one 2016 study, reported in *Clinical Psychology*, researchers reported that anger has ""negative consequences, including greater symptom severity and worse treatment response."

A 2013 study, this one reported in *Personality and Individual Differences,* researchers found that anger expressed internally and, vocally towards others, contributes to the severity of depressive symptoms.

Another study reported in *JAMA Psychiatry* finds irritability and anger in people with major depression are connected to additional mental health problems and greater severity of depression. In this long-term study, researchers investigated data from over 500 people over a period of 31 years, as part of a National Institute of Mental Health survey.

Fifty-four percent of the *JAMA* study participants had symptoms of irritable and anger. The researchers concluded these symptoms were associated with higher disease severity, longer disease course, higher rates of substance abuse, anxiety, and antisocial disorders, and great psychological impairment.

Symptoms of Anger and Depression

People with depression often have an inner critic that promotes feelings of guilt and unworthiness. These feelings also make us angry.

When we listen to that inner critic, it worsens depression and makes it harder to stand up to that inner voice. Standing up means thinking positively, feeling better about yourself, partaking in enjoyable activities, and being more social.

Angry feelings – even with depression – go away after shorter periods, and include the following symptoms:

- Rapid heartbeat
- Rage and aggression
- Increased blood pressure

The symptoms of depression include intense sadness that lasts for weeks or more. Additional symptoms include:

- Anger
- Confusion and helplessness
- Loss of energy and motivation
- Loss of interest in activities once enjoyed, including sex
- Body aches and pain with no cause
- Thoughts of suicide or harm

People who experience anger with depression tend to hide their anger. Sometimes, however, it is difficult to hide anger, and that anger results in aggression towards loved ones.

Anyone who thinks about harming themselves or others should seek emergency help.

Treatment

If specific people or situations trigger your anger, you may have to limit your interaction with these triggers. Breathing exercises, going outside for fresh air, or taking walks, can help you to relax when you feel anger coming on.

If anger is lasting for extended periods, your doctor may recommend additional treatments, including seeing a therapist. A therapist can help you work through angry feelings and manage your depression.

Coping with Anger and Depression

In addition to following your depression treatment plan, there are positive ways to deal with your anger.

Talk It Out

A trusted friend or family member can be someone to talk to about what you are feeling. If you would prefer to speak to someone isn't close to you, support groups are an alternative option.

You may also want to talk to a mental health professional if you are not already doing so.

Get Moving

Depression can make it hard to get motivated to exercise, but exercise can help to improve your mood. Exercise releases endorphins, hormones that improve mood.

Running, walking and yoga are all great exercises to help reduce anger, stress, and other depressive symptoms.

Sleep Better

Focus on getting 7 to 8 hours of sleep every night. Feeling rested helps your mood and motivation and minimizes irritability and anger.

If you are having problems falling asleep or staying awake, your doctor may need to adjust other medications you are taking or prescribe a temporary sleep aid.

Enjoy the Things You Love

Making time for yourself can help improve your moods. Plan activities that you enjoy and don’t forget to choose activities that can help you relax, such as taking a warm bath or going for a walk.

Take Deep Breaths

Taking deep breaths can help calm you when you are feeling angry. Take deep breaths from your diaphragm, which is located between the thoracic cavity (containing your heart and lungs) and the abdominal cavity.

Listening to calming music or practicing yoga can also help.

Acceptance

Accepting that anger is part of depression can help you manage it better. When people express anger in healthy ways, depression and angry feelings lessen.

And the more we resist the urge to let angry feelings take over and allow ourselves to feel what we need to feel, the more compassion we have for ourselves and others. Moreover, managing anger can help you face many challenges that come your way, including depression.