



Impact of Anger on Your Life – and Pain

Anger is destructive. Although acute situational anger is necessary for navigating life's pitfall's, remaining chronically angry will destroy you, your quality of life, and relationships. It is also the tipping point of healing versus remaining in pain.

The tipping point

Although you can experience significant improvement in your pain without processing your anger, it is usually modest compared to those who experience dramatic healing in relationship to letting go of anger. Creating a shift in your brain to enjoyable circuits and stimulating the formation new ones is one of the core concepts in healing. The vast majority of people suffering from chronic pain are still angry at the person or situation that caused the pain. (1) That means your nervous system is connected to the past instead of moving forward. You are stuck.

A metaphor showing the impact of anger is how they handle elephants in India. When the elephants are very small, they train them to stay in one place by tying one foot to a stake with a chain. When the elephant has grown into a huge adult, it will still be held in place by the same type of small stake. They have been programmed to think of the stake as something that cannot be broken. Anger is similar in that it anchors you down. You are also reinforcing these destructive circuits and your whole body remains on high alert.



What makes this process hard to watch is that letting go isn't nearly as difficult as you might think and the impact on a patient's life happens quickly. The anger switch is either on or off and there is not much middle ground. Within weeks of crossing this divide there is usually a significant improvement in pain, other physical symptoms abate, and anxiety drops. The difficulty is in making the initial decision to give up anger because it is so powerful and addicting.

Rachel's Story

Rachel was a middle-aged woman who had undergone four major spine surgeries and still had ongoing pain. I had performed the last two surgeries, each of which gave her about six months of relief. When the pain

returned, the new studies were fine and there was nothing I could do to surgically help her. By this time, she knew my lines well, but was not buying the pain pathways idea and that ongoing anger could keep all of her pain fired up. I finally gave up and encouraged her to get another opinion. About a year later I received a jubilant email from her that she was free of pain. Her comment was, “Who would have thought it was the anger?” Once she crossed that line, her pain resolved within a few weeks. She has remarried and is still thriving in the middle of a lot of ongoing personal adversity. She’s moving forward and creating her own life.

Your health

When your body is subjected to ongoing high levels of inflammation and stress hormones, it will break down. It is similar to driving your car down the freeway in 2nd gear instead of cruising in 5th. There are over 30 physical and mental symptoms that are possible, in addition to developing serious diseases. Your body must be able to rest and regenerate and remaining upset doesn’t accomplish this. (2)

In addition to having a shorter life span, (3) the ongoing inflammation also includes your brain. You can’t think clearly because blood flow is shifted away from the rational thinking centers (frontal lobe) and your brain physically shrinks. (4) Fortunately, it regains normal size after the pain resolves. It is a catch-22 in that decrease in cognition often blocks engagement with treatment. It is the reason why The DOC Journey is arranged in a specific sequence. It is critical to approach all of this in a systematic manner and allow your brain to heal as you are ready.

Quality of life

Suffering from unrelenting pain is like having your soul pounded into the ground by a pile driver. Your life is being systematically destroyed. You may have achieved a full and successful life only to have it consumed by pain. The dark place that develops in and envelops your mind is deep. My patients cannot find words to describe the depth of frustration they feel being in The Abyss.

Dr. John Sarno, a famous rehab physician used the word, “rage” to describe this scenario. (5) It may be the worst part of the human experience. We all deserve to live free of constant pain and it is a basic need. It has been shown that the impact of chronic pain on a person’s quality of life is equivalent to having terminal cancer. (6) We cannot accomplish higher goals and flourish as human beings without first securing the comfort of being in our bodies.

It is anger that ushers you into The Abyss and anger that keeps you there. People intellectually know that being chronically angry, as most chronic pain patients understandably are, is not a great way to live life. Yet a high percentage of the population lives in this state. There are over 100 million people in the U.S. alone suffering from chronic pain. (7) There are many ways to fall into and remain in The Abyss including:

- Having a need for validation
- Disguising your anger from others and yourself
- Choosing to remain a victim
- Keeping this as your baseline state
- Being a perfectionist
- Having dashed hopes – “The Pit of Despair”

Your relationships

Pain = Frustration. In the presence of unrelenting pain this frustration can be intense. You become disconnected from subtle cues in your immediate surroundings and your awareness goes to zero. Lack of awareness is the essence of abuse. Although you may not see it that way your family, especially your children are perceiving you much differently. They are completely dependent on you, have no control and they are fearful, if not terrified

when you are upset. At a minimum, you have ceased to become the source of peace, joy and happiness within your family. There is a high chance you are not volunteering to be their coach or taking an active role in their lives. However it is manifested, chronic pain takes a terrible toll on those close to you.

Chronic pain plays out in the family in several ways:

- Mirror neurons – when a small baby smiles back at you, it is simply because the smiling center of his or her brain was stimulated. When your partner or spouse is in a bad mood it lights up the same region of your brain.
- Anger is abusive. The least logical place to take out your frustrations is on your family. Yet the family is often the most common target of people in pain.
- Patients in pain often do not feel believed by other family members that they are in pain. When they express pain, either verbally or by actions, the response of those close to them may be hostile. Research shows that the pain increases. It is a toxic and unpleasant cycle. (8)
- Patients in pain will often discuss their pain with anyone who will listen. Obviously, the family will hear the most complaining. Pain pathways are not only reinforced, everyone around is frustrated because there is not much they can do to help. They also become worn out with listening. It's also not that interesting.
- Even families who are pretty functional are seriously impacted by a member suffering from chronic pain. I'm finding few exceptions.



This article reflects only the smallest fraction on how anger can and will destroy your life and the lives of those close to you. It is simply a higher level of response to threat and the frontal lobes of your brain don't function well. It is the antithesis of awareness, which is the essence of functional relationships, including that to yourself. Please make an effort to learn the skills to process anger and take back your life.

Our afflictions are not imposed by the Divine.

Rather, they lead us to the Divine more often than our joys do.

Do not resist the bitter pills in your life; know that they will lead you to a greater awareness.

- Bernie Siegel

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