

Hostility and Your Health

“Anger Kills”

This is the name of a book written a number of years ago by a cardiologist and his wife Drs. Redford and Virginia Williams. This book shares how not only Anger kills, but so does Hostility.

Anger is the feeling we quickly have when something doesn't go our way, or when we get frustrated.

Hostility, on the other hand, describes our attitude that can cause us to get angry. Usually people who do not have a problem with hostility do not get angry as much. It is the mindset that we can call hostility that leads to the feelings of anger.

But, a hostile attitude doesn't mean we are jumping down people's throats every day. Instead, if we have problems with hostility, we usually see ourselves as quite principled people. We can easily decide that something is wrong or right...the problem? It is easy to see the things that are wrong...a lot.

Symptoms of Hostility

We can easily see all those other idiot drivers on the road who just do NOT know how to drive. Or, we notice when people have more items in their carts in the express checkout line. Or, we simply do not understand how someone could vote for their political party. Or, when someone wrongs us, we feel like we need to right that wrong by evening up the score somehow.

That leads to another problem. If we can't get even, we at least can withhold our forgiveness. Then, of course we all know that when we hold back our forgiveness, we are not really hurting the other person, but are only hurting ourselves. Anger Kills, remember?

What Can We Do?

So, we know that it is important to learn more about how Hostility and Anger can be a risk factor for our health. But most importantly, we need to learn what we can do make our minds and our bodies healthier. This starts with taking an honest look at our mindset and attitude. Remember, sometimes the people closest to us, may know us better than we do ourselves.

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What Science Tells Us

When couples took a hostility test on themselves and also on their spouse, for many of them, it was the spouse's rating that predicted better who had more calcification in their arteries (an indicator of heart disease). In other words, we all have our blind spots and others can sometimes see this part better than we can.

Smith, TW, et al., *Psychosomatic Medicine*, 69:441-448 (2007)

People who didn't have heart disease took a hostility test and were tracked for 6 years. The high hostility scorers were twice as likely to increase their blood pressure and also more likely to develop heart disease.

Player, MS, *Annals of Family Medicine*, 2007 Sep-Oct;5(5):403-11

Asking heart patients to recall a time he or she felt angry can cause the heart to pump less efficiently.

Ironson, G et al, *American Journal of Cardiology*, 1992 Aug 1

How Does Anger Kill?

It triggers stress chemicals that affects our:

- Blood pressure
- Cholesterol
- How quickly our blood will clot
- Sugar levels
- Heart's pumping efficiency

And many of us have to take medication for most of these.