

What to do when you get angry or depressed

This may sound strange, but the first thing that I suggest you do is congratulate yourself for noticing your anger or depression. A lot of the time people aren't aware of their anger or depression. They try to go about their normal routine and can't understand why it doesn't work. Knowing that you are angry or depressed gives you a big advantage.

The second thing I suggest that you do is give yourself a break. Having a chronic illness very often means some new, major, often painful challenges to deal with. It also often means a loss of former abilities and dreams, and a loss of some of the control we used to have of our bodies and our lives. Faced with all of that, anger and depression are common, understandable responses. So I strongly encourage you to not be angry, disappointed, or upset with yourself for feeling angry or depressed.

That said, it has been shown that anger and depression weaken the immune system, which leaves us more susceptible to flares and other diseases. So it's definitely not a good idea to stay angry or depressed.

As I said, one of the reasons those of us with chronic illnesses become angry or depressed is because we've lost some of the control we used to have (note: by control I mean the ability to bring about an outcome we desire). We can all too easily find ourselves dwelling on our situation and the control we've lost. But doing this keeps us stuck in our anger and depression. A better response is to find ways either to regain the control we've lost or find other areas or situations in our lives that we can control. Without exception, everyone I know who's done this has discovered that they had a lot more control in their life than they realized.

For example, if unpredictable flare-ups keep you from attending school, you can look into online courses. If vision problems from MS or diabetes make it impossible to read your computer screen then you can get magnification or text to audio software.

There are many ways we can find new areas in our lives that we can control, i.e. areas where we can bring about outcomes we desire. Some possibilities are taking gardening or painting or learning to play a new musical instrument.

While these suggestions have worked for many people, some of you may also want talk about your situation with a spouse or a friend, and together brainstorm ways for you get more control. Another possibility is to talk to a professional such as a coach or therapist. Whatever ways you choose, good luck in regaining control in your life.