

## IRRITABILITY - WHY IT OCCURS AND WHAT YOU CAN DO TO REDUCE IT

Many factors can cause or contribute to *irritability* and the feeling of agitation that you might experience in response to stressful situations. It may also be a symptom of a mental or physical health condition.

Quick to anger and quick to tears? Most of us know when we are irritable or can sense irritability in those around us. Ever feel so frustrated and annoyed that even the slightest thing seems like it could set you off? Irritability is a mood, and anger is its defining emotion.

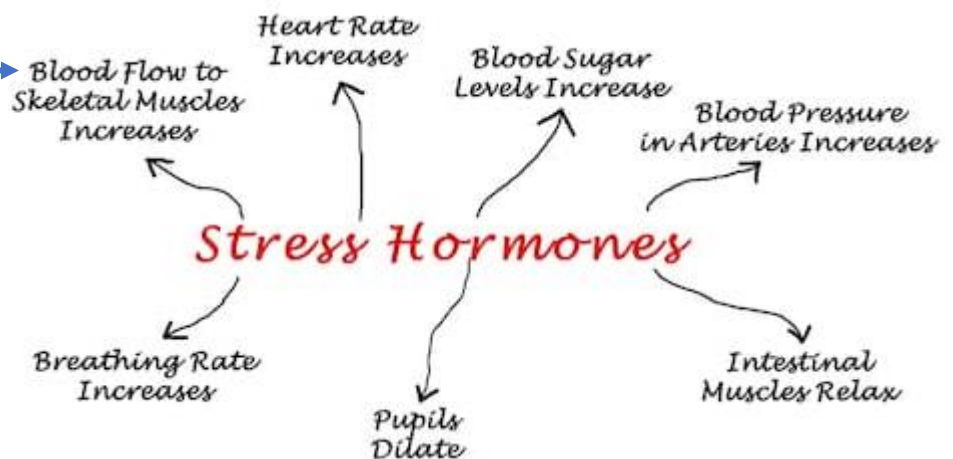
Irritability is something we all experience, but what sets it apart from other emotional states is the extent to which it negatively influences the emotions of oneself and others.



Irritability

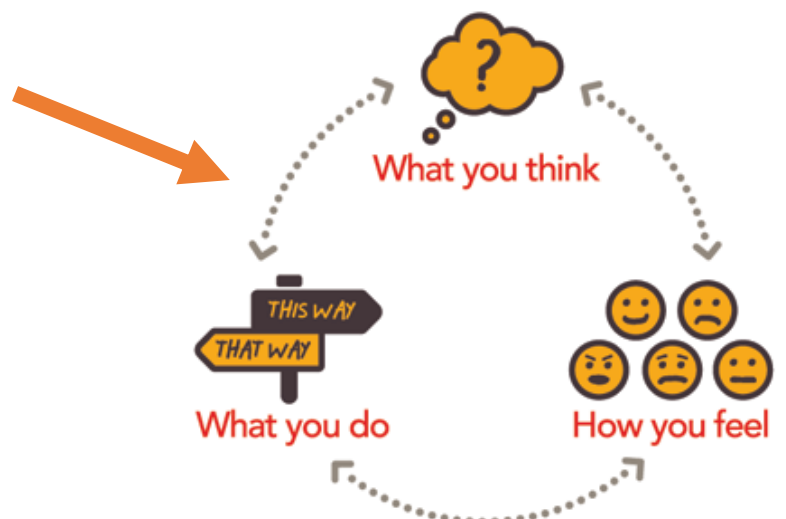
When we feel irritable, we feel on edge and grumpy, our tolerance is lower, and we are much more likely to be bothered by the kinds of minor frustrations we ordinarily shrug off. Our reactions to irritants are also likely to be much more aggressive than usual, leading us to snap at those around us.

Irritability is no treat for any of us experiencing it. Our stress hormones surge into action and we enter the same fight-or-flight mentality our ancestors did when they were on bear-watch duty at the clan's cave entrance. The slightest movement or noise can make us jump and react as if we are under attack, with no threat in sight. Most people would happily snap their fingers and rid themselves of this toxic emotional state if they could.

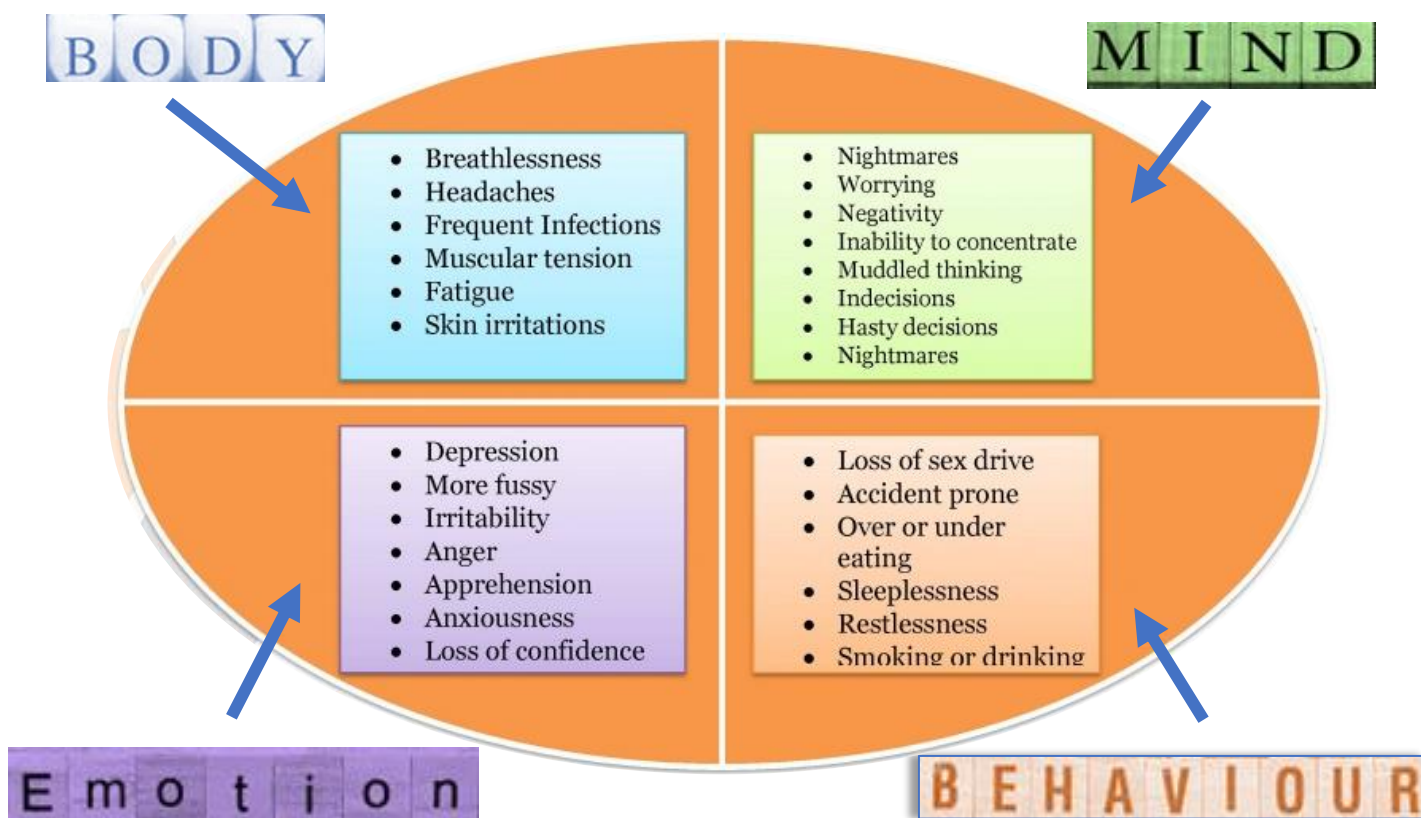


### Thought – Feeling Cycle

Humans are very complex beings, so the cycle goes both ways. In addition to how we think affects our feelings and actions, our feelings and actions can influence how we think. Our thoughts, feelings and actions are always interlinked, with arrows going in all directions.



Irritability impacts our **Mind**, **Emotions**, **Body** and our **Behaviour**



Let's learn healthy ways of managing and coping with irritability....

The following link guides us on how to do diaphragmatic breathing:

[Reducing Stress Through Deep Breathing \(Video Resource\)](#)

Start searching online and see what other information you can find that may be useful for you!

How to Manage Anxiety When You're *Irritable or Angry*

• **Check Your Breathing and Take a Time Out.** Breathe in through your nose for a count of three, then out through your mouth for a count of four. If breathing doesn't work, remove yourself from the situation for a moment or two.

• **Be honest.** We all get angry. We all get irritable. By being honest about what's wrong, however, we can move past the anger much more quickly.

• **Be active.** Physical exercise works off energy and releases endorphins. It also provides an outlet for aggression.

• **Be gentle.** You can't let go of anger if you're angry at yourself for feeling that way. Remind yourself that you're doing the best you can.



### **Step 1. What is the source?**

The best way to reduce irritability is to figure out what is making you irritable—and then address it. Identify when you first became irritable and consider what might have set you off. It is important to remember that while your reactions might feel complex at the moment, the issue that triggered them might be simple.



### **Step 2. Reduce caffeine and alcohol!**

I once worked with an employee of a coffee shop who had problems with irritability. It turns out the real problem was the hourly mochaccino breaks he was taking. Too much caffeine during the day and too much alcohol at night are frequent sources of irritability for many people. Consider cutting back.



### **Step 3. Is it often the little things?**

We often dismiss considering things that shouldn't make us irritable even if they actually do. Be honest with yourself about what's bothering you: Simply acknowledging that something is irritable is often enough to take the edge off.

### **Step 4. Get in touch with your compassion!**

Being compassionate—with yourself—can be a powerful way to calm your churning emotions. Acknowledge (in your head) that you feel really irritable—and how unpleasant it is. Then imagine getting a hug from someone who cares about you. Once you feel a little better, use your compassion to consider how it has made those around you feel, and how important it is to not take it out on them.

Compassion is a  
treasure hidden  
in plain sight.



### **Step 5. Gain perspective!**

We usually feel irritable about small-to-medium size annoyances—the kind we probably won't remember in a few days or weeks. Take a few minutes to remind yourself of the larger picture—the things that are going well in your life and the things for which you can be grateful, such as health and employment. But if you feel too unsettled to do this kind of thinking, give the following a try.

### **Step 6. Get rid yourself of nervous energy.**

Since irritability activates our fight-or-flight response sets, it might be a good idea to take a quick walk or run, or, if that's not possible, do some quick push-ups or crunches to rid yourself of excess energy that might be fuelling your irritability. Fresh air on a leisurely walk could do wonders as well. For those who cannot use exercise, the entirely opposite approach works as well.





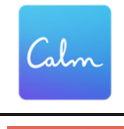

### **Step 7. Get quiet or alone time!**

Find a quiet place to think things through, or to disengage from the commotion and activity around you. Irritability can be your mind's way of alerting you that you need a break, so take one. Listen to music, do some stretching or yoga, meditate, or take a bubble bath. When you're done, take a deep breath and prepare yourself to re-engage so your system isn't shocked back into irritability once you re-enter the fray.

**Our recommended resources (click for direct access):**

<b>NHS Inform</b>	Offers the most up-to-date advice on dealing varying mental health difficulties, including the 5 Steps to Mental Wellbeing. <b>Please visit:</b> <a href="#">NHS Inform</a>
<b>Wellbeing</b>	Our website offers a variety of self-help materials, groups, and courses for all sorts of problems that you may be facing. Anyone can download the self- help materials. <b>Please visit:</b> <a href="#">Wellbeing Website Glasgow</a>
<b>Mental Health Foundation</b>	A range of content designed to give you more information about mental health and to help you to look after your mental health. <b>Please visit:</b> <a href="#">Your Mental Health - Mental Health Foundation</a>
<b>NHS Every Mind Matters</b>	Interactive website providing you the opportunity to complete a short quiz which creates a Mind Plan of what you can do to improve your mental health. <b>Please visit:</b> <a href="#">Every Mind Matters</a>
<b>Psych Central</b>	Run by mental health professionals offering reliable, trusted information to individuals struggling with a mental health. There is also an excellent quiz section allowing you to find out more about your symptoms and how to manage these. <b>Please visit:</b> <a href="#">PsychCentral for Mental Health</a>
<b>MIND</b>	Information hub provides advice on how to support your mental wellbeing. <b>Please visit:</b> <a href="#">MIND Information Hub</a>
<b>SAMH</b>	Hub of information and guidance about looking after mental health. <b>Please visit:</b> <a href="#">SAMH Guidance for Mental Health</a>

**Useful Apps:**

	Mind Shift	Rather than trying to avoid anxious feelings, Mind Shift stresses the importance of changing how you think about anxiety. It can encourage you to take charge of your life, ride out intense emotions, and face challenging situations
	SAM	SAM might be perfect for you if you're interested in self-help, but meditation isn't your thing. Users are prompted to build their own 24-hour anxiety toolkit that allows you to track anxious thoughts and behaviour over time and learn 25 different self-help techniques.
	Happify	Need a happy fix? With its psychologist-approved mood-training program, the Happify app is your fast-track to a good mood. Try various engaging games, activity suggestions, gratitude prompts and more to train your brain as if it were a muscle, to overcome negative thoughts
	Headspace	The Headspace app makes meditation simple. Learn the skills of mindfulness and meditation by using this app for just a few minutes per day. You gain access to hundreds of meditations on everything from stress and anxiety to sleep and focus.
	Calm	Calm provides people experiencing stress and anxiety with guided meditations, sleep stories, breathing programs, and relaxing music.
	Smiling Mind	Smiling mind is a way to practice daily meditation and mindfulness exercises from any device. This is helpful during times of stress and is a fun and unique way to help you put a smile on your mind.

Having suicidal thoughts? Discuss with a loved one, call Samaritans on **116 123** or access your **G.P.** or **Crisis Service** via **NHS** on **111**.