

Does the pandemic have you 'pangry'?

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Are we out of the woods with COVID-19? Have we reached the endemic stage? Should we adopt the mindset that the virus is just a part of our lives now and carry on as usual?

Many people are walking around with more questions than answers as

new COVID variants emerge and case counts continue to fluctuate. Without a definitive answer as to what the next phase of the pandemic will look like, [mental fatigue](#) has set in for many during this COVID limbo, as has anxiety, depression and persistent anger.

"It's been well over two years since the start of the pandemic, and of course people are frustrated and anxious," says Patrick Bigaouette, M.D., a psychiatrist at Mayo Clinic Health System in Mankato. "When COVID-19 case counts tick back up, people are naturally nervous about whether it's OK to go to a movie, send their child to school, or the possibility of increased COVID-related public policies. The recurrent feeling of anxiety can be mentally fatiguing."

Research has shown an increase in frustration, agitation and anger throughout the course of the COVID-19 pandemic. Pandemic anger, or "panger," is a real mental health concern many people are dealing with.

"Feeling these emotions is perfectly natural response, however, we want to help people cope and respond in healthy ways," says Dr. Bigaouette. "Yelling at others, dwelling on the situation or shutting down can negatively affect one's health, work and relationships."

Here are some ideas that may help you respond more effectively to "panger" rather than simply reacting:

Step back and observe.

Take a deep breath and pay attention to what's happening in the moment without judging or evaluating your experience. Do you notice frustration and anger in your body, such as tightening of the chest, clenching of the jaw or fists, or feeling hot? You may notice an action urge or impulse, such as the urge to scream or run away.

Simply slowing down and observing anger can make it seem less overwhelming and help create space between your anger and what you do next.

Allow "panger" to be present.

People often try to avoid or get rid of unpleasant internal experiences, including thoughts, emotions and memories. With anger, the tendency to avoid can result in various automatic reactions that aren't always helpful and can even increase anger over time.

For example, lashing out at someone may make you feel better in the moment. But it doesn't often help in the long term and may even make you feel worse, such as feeling guilty for yelling at your children or a co-worker.

Listen to anger's message about what you value.

Choosing to allow anger—along with associated thoughts, emotions, physical sensations and urges—to be present without automatically trying to avoid or get rid of it creates freedom and flexibility to choose effective and meaningful actions.

Accepting anger is an active choice, not a passive resignation. It doesn't mean you're accepting the situation that may have led to anger or that you're giving up on what you care about. It means you're choosing to put energy toward effective action rather than focusing solely on trying to control the uncontrollable.

Choose effective action.

Once you've slowed down to listen to the message [anger](#) is sending you, choose your next effective action. You may not be able to control what

others say and do, or even what you think and feel, but you can control how you respond.

"People will continue to have disagreements about social distancing and gathering, about public policies related to the pandemic, about work restrictions and any number of other pandemic-related situations," says Dr. Bigaouette. "There are many things out of our control during these uncertain times, and our feelings related to these experiences are natural and appropriate. We just want to make sure we're dealing with our emotions in healthy ways."

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