Newton Hightower
Center for Anger Resolution

Anger causes a bodily reaction. Your sympathetic nervous system and muscles mobilize for physical attack. Your muscles tense and your blood pressure and heart rate skyrocket. Your digestive processes stop. Certain brain centers are triggered, which then change your brain chemistry. When you are angry, your bodily functions change for the worse.

Dr. Charles Cole, Colorado State University, found that the physiological effects of anger can cause blood vessels to constrict, increase heart rate and blood pressure, and eventually lead to the destruction of heart muscle. After studying the reactions to stress and anger in more than 800 patients, Dr. Cole concluded that every thought has a physiological consequence.

Looking at the effects of anger, Dr. Leo Maddow, chairman of the Department of Psychiatry and Neurology at the University of Pennsylvania, observed that brain hemorrhages are usually caused by a combination of hypertension and cerebral arteriosclerosis. He found that anger can produce the hypertension which explodes the diseased cerebral artery, resulting in a stroke. Not only does anger produce physical symptoms ranging from headaches to hemorrhoids, it can also seriously aggravate already existing physical illnesses. "Someone who stays angry long after the particular incident that caused the anger may be committing slow suicide."

Each episode of anger or hostility sets off a physiological response in your body causing your heart to beat faster, your blood pressure to rise, your coronary arteries to narrow, and your blood to become thicker. When the blood becomes thicker, the heart has to work harder to pump it. For people with heart disease, this reaction can reduce blood flow to the heart, creating a potentially fatal condition.

A study done by Dr. Ichiro Kawachi, of the Harvard School of Public Health, examined about 1,300 older men (average age of 62) over a seven-year period. Dr. Kawachi found that those men with the highest levels of anger were three times more likely to develop heart disease than men with the lowest levels of anger.

Other researchers at Union Memorial Hospital and Loyola College of Maryland in Baltimore interviewed 41 patients who just had angioplasties to unclog arteries. Those who scored highest in hostility

(Hostile Type A) were 2.5 times more likely to need repeat angioplasty within the year. Furthermore, contrary to the common advice from friends and therapists to "get it all out" when angry, verbally berating partners or expressing hostility towards other people only serves to compromise physical health.