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When Road Rage Strikes

Don't give in to angry outbursts - yours or another driver's. Here's how to stay cool and collected when you're behind the wheel.

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It may start with a lewd hand gesture, swearing, or a threat from one driver to another. The incident could escalate to a use of force or even a weapon. "Road rage" is a term that has come to be used for aggressive drivers who lose their tempers in traffic. The person in a rage may threaten or injure another driver, or use his or her vehicle to retaliate.

People who feel pressured and out of control may take it out on others while driving.

They may feel stressed from having to rush between home and work, picking up children, or getting to appointments. Traffic jams can add to the frustration. If someone or something is seen as "in the way," feelings of [anxiety](#) or anger may erupt.

People may have fewer inhibitions on the road. Although most people would not think of cursing at someone in a grocery store, they may feel free to do so when driving past a stranger. The angry driver may feel anonymous - and thus not accountable. .

Recurring road rage may be linked to a [psychiatric problem](#) called [intermittent explosive disorder](#) . This involves a pattern of sudden, angry episodes that are usually out of proportion to the event.

What to do when an angry driver strikes

- **Practice good driving.** To avoid the rage of others, don't get distracted by talking on your cell phone, eating, drinking, or putting on makeup in the car.

- **Put your pride aside.** Don't challenge the other driver by speeding up or trying to hold your own. Consider that you may have done something - without knowing it - to upset the other driver. Accidentally cutting off a driver, riding too close, or pulling out in front of someone can trigger rage.
- **Avoid anyone who is driving too quickly, slowly, or unsafely.** It's best to move away from him or her, or let the person pass you.
- **Don't make eye contact when someone threatens you.** Ignore gestures, and certainly don't return them.
- **If you are confronted and you can't get away, stay in your car and lock the doors.** Don't roll down the windows or argue with the person. Drive toward a populated, well-lit area. Write down the license plate number and make of the car, and call 9-1-1 if you have a mobile phone.
- **If you see a driver who presents a real danger, report it.** On some highways, there are signs that give you a cell phone number to call to report aggressive drivers.

If you are the one who is raging

- **Allow extra travel time to avoid being rushed.** If you get stuck in traffic, keep yourself busy. Listen to a book on tape. Do relaxation exercises, such as deep breathing.
- **Keep your perspective.** If someone cuts you off or delays your trip by 5 seconds or even 5 minutes, will this matter in 2 years? In 1 mile, you save *4 seconds* for each 5-mph increase in speed. Ask yourself if it's worth risking lives - including your own - for that little time.
- **Take back your control.** Letting others frustrate you gives them power. By staying calm, you will be in control.
- **Stay cool.** Stress affects your health. It can raise your [blood pressure](#) , cause [headaches](#) , and generally make a bad situation worse. Chronic stress may lead to fatigue, insomnia, or more serious health problems.

Frequent episodes of anger, arguments on the road, and risky driving may be signs that you need [counseling](#) . If you have sudden, explosive outbursts , seek help. Learning how to cope with your anger could save your life, and possibly the lives of others.

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SOURCES:

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