

Managing Irritability and Agitation

Objective

To identify ways to appropriately manage irritability and agitation.

What to Know

Irritability is not a change in mood, exactly; it is feeling heightened annoyance with others. Your co-worker might get under your skin more than normal, or the drivers surrounding you on the highway are even more stupid and reckless! Agitation feels like restlessness, distress, discomfort, or a general unsettled feeling. You might fidget more or have problems sitting still and focusing.

Irritability and agitation affect your relationships, because you are more likely to pick a fight or argue unnecessarily with others. This worksheet will help you notice these symptoms early and better manage them when they arise.

What to Do

Do any of the following statements apply to you? Check off the appropriate statements.

- I am having more disagreements than usual with others.
- I am finding other people more annoying than normal.
- I am being more aggressive than assertive in my interactions with others.
- I am more easily frustrated.
- I am having more arguments than usual.
- I have threatened someone.
- I have gotten into a physical fight.
- I have trouble sitting still.
- I notice I am clenching my fists or jaw.
- I find it nearly impossible to focus for any length of time.
- I just cannot shake this feeling of unsettledness.

If you checked off more than three statements, you might be currently experiencing an elevation of mood. To stop the progression into hypomania, contact your treatment team for additional support.

When you experienced irritability and agitation in the past, what did you notice? What happened?

In the past, how quickly did symptoms start? _____

How long did they last? _____

In the past, what did you do to appropriately manage these symptoms?

There are things you can do to increase your awareness of irritability and agitation.

Fill in the following chart with the thoughts and behaviors associated with irritability and agitation you have experienced in the past. Note any negative consequences.

Thoughts	Behaviors	Consequences
<i>"My co-worker is so annoying!"</i>	<i>I sent a nasty email to him.</i>	<i>I got fired.</i>

Refer to the chart. Can you see those thoughts and reactions were a result of your irritability and agitation? Why or why not?

In each of the four scenarios, what are some ways you could have reacted differently?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

Though it can be difficult to go directly from agitation to relaxation, here are some tips for relieving tension and stress to reduce your irritability and agitation.

- exercise – go for a hike, ride your bicycle, or take a run
- practice deep breathing
- do progressive muscle relaxation
- listen to calming music
- meditate
- remove yourself from a highly stimulating environment
- pause an argument and resume the conversation later

The next time you feel irritated and agitated, what will you do?

Reflections on This Exercise

What else can you do to manage irritability and agitation?

After completing this activity, how successful were you at reducing irritability and agitation, where 1 = not at all successfully, and 10 = completely successful: _____

What was most challenging about this exercise? Explain.

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn in this exercise that was helpful?
