



## Bitch Craft

Complain too much and you raise your stress levels and risk for disease. Don't vent at all and...the same thing could happen! We present a field guide to healthy griping—when to open up, when to shut it.

*By Jamie Hergenrader*

When some A-hole cuts you off in traffic or you have a craptastic day at work, nothing is more satisfying than ranting about it—to a friend, your guy, or the whole world (hi, Facebook). That's because empathy and understanding from others validates our feelings and can relieve pent-up angst, says Julie Norem, Ph.D., a psychology professor at Wellesley College. But only to a point. The average person gripes at least 20 times a day—and near-constant grumbling can alienate

friends (no one likes a whiner) and torpedo your health: Kvetching, or even just listening to someone else kvetch, can cause levels of the stress hormone cortisol to skyrocket, upping your risk for cardiovascular disease and depression. And every time you moan, you condition the neural pathways of your brain to make it a habit, amplifying those negative effects. About to blow a gasket? Take a deep breath—and these rules of engagement into account.