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Experiencing a rollercoaster of negative emotions more quickly than other people is a trait often referred to as “neuroticism.”It can be typical to have times when stress makes you a little short-tempered or emotionally raw.During these vulnerable moments, outbursts and extreme emotional displays may just be the release you’ve needed from long-term pressure.But when little inconveniences regularly lead to big feelings of anxiety, irritability, or hyper-alertness, you may be experiencing something more.Neuroticism is a personality trait, not a mental health condition. It’s defined as being prone to easily aroused, sometimes uncontrollable, negative emotions that don’t interfere with daily function.If you live with neuroticism, for example, you might find that your emotions are easily stimulated, and when you’re at the height of feeling, you may find it challenging to calm down.Neuroticism is considered one of the “Big Five” personality traits in psychological development theory, originally outlined in 1949 by D.W. Fiske.Like all personality traits, neuroticism exists on a continuum. It isn’t a one-time display of erratic emotions.Trait theory in psychology considers all traits to be habitual patterns of behavior with stable features.To what degree you express neuroticism on the continuum is part of what defines that personality trait for you and sets you apart from someone else who also experiences neurotic behavior.A 2017 review suggests that neuroticism is often associated with poorer mental and physical health outcomes.But a 2019 study suggests that genetic variants of neurotic behaviors may have protective functions such as high intelligence and longer lifespan.“Being neurotic” is a phrase that’s often attached to stigma, possibly due to its similarity to the word “neurosis.”Neurosis is an outdated diagnostic term once used to describe otherwise unexplainable psychological behaviors.Someone might say another person is neurotic because they felt that person’s reaction to a situation didn’t make sense. They may even accuse them of “overreacting.”When neuroticism is a part of your personality, it doesn’t mean you react emotionally without cause.Your reactions may occur because frustrations truly feel overwhelming in that moment. They may push you to anger, irritability, or depression.You may not show any outward signs but, instead, internalize negative emotions such as anxiety or self-consciousness.Some examples of neurotic behaviors can include:anxiously fixating on what others might think of your outfit at a business dinnerobsessively worrying that you did something wrong if you haven’t heard from a friend recentlyexpressing extreme guilt and shame for using the last piece of breadbeing so protective and worried about a child that you don’t allow them to play or interact with other childrenThere’s no definitive list for symptoms of neuroticism, but you may experience behaviors such as:a natural inclination for negative emotions (anger, anxiety, sadness, depression, self-doubt, jealousy, etc.)easy emotional stimulationpersistent worrying or ruminatingfinding it challenging to manage emotions in the momentexperiencing major shifts in emotionsfeeling unable to cope with or overcome challengesregular tendency to have excessive reactions to minor scenariospersistent worryingNeuroticism isn’t a mental health condition because neuroticism as a personality trait isn’t severe enough to impair basic areas of your daily functioning.When neuroticism reaches a point where it’s preventing you from living life, it may be more than just a personality trait. Consider speaking with a healthcare or mental health professional to determine whether there may be another underlying cause to your symptoms.Experiencing neuroticism doesn’t mean that there’s something wrong with you.It could mean that you may find yourself in a constant state of negative emotions, which may not be how you want to spend your days.When negative emotions are coming on strong, you can help cope with neurotic behaviors by finding ways to return to a place of emotional balance.Mindfulness, the practice of acknowledging thoughts without ruminating on them, has many applications in the world of mental health.At its core, mindfulness can help you realize when you’re worrying or obsessing over a thought. By realizing you’re in a neurotic moment, you can help shift your focus to something else.The concept of thought replacement sounds simple — swap the negative thought for a positive one.A 2016 study on generalized anxiety disorder found that positive thought replacement through images or verbal cues helped to reduce both anxiety and worry.It may not be easy to redirect your train of thought in the moment, though. Writing down a positive affirmation and keeping it in your pocket or carrying bag ready to be accessed when needed can help.A 2020 study found that training your emotional intelligence can help increase your resilience and your emotional stability, allowing you to have fewer moments where neuroticism takes over.A number of self-help books and courses exist to help improve emotional intelligence, but you can start the process by:writing down your behaviors, as well as the behaviors of those around you, and naming their corresponding emotionsasking those around you to explain what they’re feeling in the momentusing literature to help you associate behaviors with deep-felt emotionsNeuroticism isn’t a mental health condition, but sometimes talking with a qualified mental health professional can help you work through your experiences.Neurotic behaviors are habitual displays of excessive emotion toward minor situations.Living with neuroticism doesn’t mean that you’re living with a mental health condition. Calming practices, emotional training, and professional guidance can all help you manage neurotic tendencies.If behaviors of neuroticism occur and it’s interfering with your daily function, a mental health professional can help you address underlying conditions such as mood or personality disorders. From the relentless inner critic to the constant battle with worry and self-doubt, neuroticism casts a long shadow over the lives of those who grapple with this complex personality trait. It’s a psychological characteristic that has fascinated researchers and clinicians for decades, shaping our understanding of human behavior and mental health in profound ways. Imagine a world where every minor setback feels like a catastrophe, where the simplest decision becomes an agonizing ordeal, and where the fear of failure looms large over even the most mundane tasks. Welcome to the world of the highly neurotic individual. It’s a place where emotions run wild, and the mind seems to be in a perpetual state of turmoil. But what exactly is neuroticism, and why does it matter so much in the field of psychology? To answer these questions, we need to take a journey through the annals of psychological research, exploring the roots of this fascinating concept and its impact on our understanding of the human psyche. The story of neuroticism in psychology is a tale as old as the field itself. It’s a concept that has evolved alongside our understanding of human personality, shaped by the insights of pioneering psychologists and refined through decades of research. Back in the early days of psychology, when Sigmund Freud was still puffing on his cigars and pondering the mysteries of the unconscious mind, the term “neurotic” was already in use. But it meant something quite different from what we understand today. Freud and his contemporaries used it to describe a range of psychological disorders, from anxiety to obsessive-compulsive behaviors. As psychology matured as a discipline, so too did our understanding of neuroticism. The real breakthrough came with the development of trait theory in personality psychology. Researchers began to see neuroticism not as a disorder, but as a fundamental dimension of personality – one that exists to varying degrees in all of us. This shift in perspective was revolutionary. Suddenly, neuroticism wasn’t just something that affected a select few “neurotic” individuals. It was a trait that could be measured and studied across the entire population. This realization opened up new avenues for research and sparked a flurry of studies aimed at understanding the nature and implications of this complex trait. So, what exactly do psychologists mean when they talk about neuroticism? At its core, neuroticism refers to a tendency towards negative emotionality and emotional instability. It’s not just about being “nervous” or “high-strung” – it’s a fundamental aspect of personality that influences how we perceive and react to the world around us. People high in neuroticism tend to experience more frequent and intense negative emotions. They’re more likely to feel anxious, depressed, or angry in response to life’s challenges. They may also be more sensitive to stress and more prone to worry and self-doubt. It’s important to note that neuroticism is not the same as neurosis, despite the similarity in terms. While neurosis refers to a specific category of mental health disorders, neuroticism is a personality trait that exists on a continuum. Everyone has some level of neuroticism – it’s just a question of where you fall on the scale. Neuroticism is one of the “Big Five” personality traits, alongside extroversion, openness, agreeableness, and conscientiousness. These five traits are considered the fundamental building blocks of human personality, shaping our behavior, our relationships, and our overall approach to life. Now that we’ve defined neuroticism, let’s dive deeper into what it actually looks like in practice. What are the key characteristics of individuals high in neuroticism? First and foremost, emotional instability is a hallmark of neuroticism. Highly neurotic individuals often experience rapid and intense mood swings. One moment they might be feeling relatively calm and content, and the next they’re plunged into anxiety or despair. It’s like riding an emotional rollercoaster – exhilarating at times, but often exhausting and disorienting. Anxiety and excessive worry are also common features of neuroticism. Highly neurotic individuals tend to be hyper-vigilant, always on the lookout for potential threats or problems. They might spend hours worrying about unlikely scenarios or obsessing over minor details. This constant state of alertness can be mentally and physically draining, leading to fatigue and burnout. Self-consciousness and sensitivity to criticism are other key traits associated with neuroticism. People high in this trait often have a fragile self-esteem and are acutely aware of how others perceive them. They may take even mild criticism to heart, interpreting it as a devastating blow to their self-worth. This hypersensitivity can make social interactions challenging and may lead to avoidance of potentially stressful situations. Perhaps most notably, individuals high in neuroticism have a tendency towards negative emotions and pessimism. They’re more likely to focus on the negative aspects of a situation and to anticipate the worst possible outcomes. This emotional stability can color their entire worldview, making life seem like a series of challenges and disappointments rather than opportunities and adventures. It’s worth noting that these traits exist on a spectrum. Someone high in neuroticism might not exhibit all of these characteristics all the time, and the intensity can vary from person to person. It’s also important to remember that neuroticism, like all personality traits, is not inherently “good” or “bad” – it’s simply a part of who we are. Given the complex and subjective nature of personality traits, you might wonder how psychologists actually measure neuroticism. After all, it’s not like we can stick a “neuroticism meter” on someone’s forehead and get a reading, right? Well, while we don’t have a neuroticism meter (yet), psychologists have developed a range of tools and techniques for assessing this elusive trait. These assessments typically take the form of questionnaires or interviews designed to probe an individual’s typical thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. One of the most widely used tools is the NEO Personality Inventory (NEO-PI), which measures all of the Big Five personality traits, including neuroticism. This comprehensive assessment asks individuals to rate how strongly they agree or disagree with a series of statements about their typical behavior and emotional responses. Another popular tool is the Eysenck Personality Questionnaire (EPQ), which focuses specifically on neuroticism (along with extroversion and psychoticism). This assessment uses a series of yes/no questions to gauge an individual’s level of emotional stability and reactivity. These assessments provide psychologists with a numerical score that indicates where an individual falls on the neuroticism spectrum. But it’s important to remember that these scores are not definitive labels. They’re more like guideposts, helping us understand an individual’s general tendencies and potential vulnerabilities. Of course, no measurement tool is perfect, and there are limitations to how we assess neuroticism. Self-report measures, for instance, rely on an individual’s own perceptions and honesty. Some people might not have accurate insight into their own behavior, or they might be tempted to present themselves in a more favorable light. Moreover, these assessments provide a snapshot of an individual’s personality at a particular point in time. While personality traits are generally stable, they can shift over time or in response to significant life events. This is why psychologists often use multiple assessment methods and consider an individual’s scores in the context of their overall life experiences and current circumstances. While neuroticism is a normal personality trait, high levels of neuroticism can have significant implications for mental health and overall well-being. Research has consistently shown that individuals high in neuroticism are at increased risk for a range of psychological disorders, particularly anxiety and depression. The link between neuroticism and anxiety disorders is particularly strong. It’s not hard to see why – the tendency towards worry and emotional reactivity that characterizes neuroticism aligns closely with the symptoms of many anxiety disorders. Individuals high in neuroticism may be more likely to develop generalized anxiety disorder, panic disorder, or specific phobias. Depression is another common concern for highly neurotic individuals. The tendency towards negative emotions and pessimism associated with neuroticism can create a fertile ground for depressive thoughts and feelings. Moreover, the stress and emotional turmoil that often accompany high neuroticism can wear down an individual’s psychological resilience over time, making them more vulnerable to depressive episodes. But the impact of neuroticism isn’t limited to these specific disorders. High levels of neuroticism can affect overall psychological well-being in numerous ways. It can lead to chronic stress, sleep problems, and difficulties in relationships. It may also impact physical health, as the constant emotional arousal associated with neuroticism can take a toll on the body over time. It’s important to note, however, that high neuroticism doesn’t doom an individual to poor mental health. Many people with neurotic tendencies lead happy, fulfilling lives. The key lies in understanding one’s own tendencies and developing effective coping strategies. So, what can be done to manage neurotic tendencies and mitigate their potential negative impacts? While we can’t completely change our personality, there are numerous strategies and interventions that can help individuals high in neuroticism lead healthier, more balanced lives. Cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) is often a go-to treatment for individuals struggling with the negative effects of neuroticism. CBT helps people identify and challenge negative thought patterns, develop more balanced perspectives, and learn coping skills for managing anxiety and emotional reactivity. It’s like giving your mind a new set of tools to deal with life’s challenges. Mindfulness-based interventions have also shown promise in helping highly neurotic individuals. Practices like meditation and mindfulness can help people become more aware of their thoughts and emotions without getting caught up in them. It’s about learning to observe your neurotic tendencies with a sense of curiosity and detachment, rather than being swept away by them. For some individuals, medication may be helpful, particularly if neuroticism is contributing to clinically significant anxiety or depression. However, medication is typically most effective when combined with therapy and lifestyle changes. Speaking of lifestyle changes, there are numerous self-help strategies that can be beneficial for managing neurotic tendencies. Regular exercise, for instance, can help reduce anxiety and improve mood. Developing a consistent sleep routine can help stabilize emotions. And practicing good self-care – whether that means taking relaxing baths, spending time in nature, or engaging in hobbies – can help build resilience against stress and negative emotions. It’s also worth mentioning the power of self-compassion. Many highly neurotic individuals are their own harshest critics. Learning to treat oneself with kindness and understanding can be a powerful antidote to the self-doubt and negative self-talk that often accompany neuroticism. As our understanding of neuroticism continues to evolve, new avenues of research are emerging. One exciting area of study is the intersection of neuroticism and neo psychology, which explores how digital technologies and AI can be leveraged to understand and manage personality traits. Researchers are also delving deeper into the biological underpinnings of neuroticism. Studies using brain imaging techniques are shedding light on how neurotic tendencies manifest in the brain, potentially paving the way for more targeted interventions. Another intriguing area of research is the exploration of the potential benefits of neuroticism. While much focus has been on its negative impacts, some researchers argue that neurotic traits like vigilance and sensitivity can have adaptive value in certain contexts. Understanding these potential upsides could lead to a more nuanced and balanced view of this complex trait. As we look to the future, it’s clear that our understanding of neuroticism will continue to deepen and evolve. This ongoing research holds the promise of more effective treatments and interventions, as well as a greater appreciation for the rich tapestry of human personality in all its varied forms. In conclusion, neuroticism is far more than just being “neurotic.” It’s a fundamental aspect of personality that shapes how we experience and interact with the world around us. While it can present challenges, particularly when present at high levels, it’s also a part of what makes us uniquely human. By understanding neuroticism – its definition, its traits, and its impacts – we can better navigate our own emotional landscapes and foster greater empathy for the diverse ways in which people experience the world. As we continue to unravel the mysteries of the neurotic mind, one thing is clear: there’s no one-size-fits-all approach to managing neuroticism. What works for one person may not work for another. The key lies in self-awareness, self-compassion, and a willingness to explore different strategies for emotional well-being. After all, our neurotic tendencies don’t define us – they’re simply one part of the complex, fascinating beings that we are. References: 1. Barlow, D. 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Personality Disorders: Theory, Research, and Treatment, 8(3), 191-198. 7. Tackett, J. L., & Lahey, B. B. (2017). Neuroticism. In T. A. Widiger (Ed.), The Oxford handbook of the Five Factor Model (pp. 39-56). Oxford University Press. 8. Widiger, T. A., & Oltmanns, J. R. (2017). Neuroticism is a fundamental domain of personality with enormous public health implications. World Psychiatry, 16(2), 144-145. Updated 8/17/23 The word “neurotic” has negative connotations in our culture. At other times, though, neurotic feels endearing. After all, some of our best comedians use neurotic as a badge of honor and find self-deprecating humor in all their many neuroses. Neuroticism is truly one of the most debated personality traits there is. But what does neurotic mean and what personality traits describe a neurotic person? Keep reading to learn more about neuroticism including the definition, common characteristics and behaviors, and more. Neuroticism is defined by a propensity toward anxiety, negativity, and self-doubt. It is often experienced by constantly rehashing worst–case scenarios in your head, and can be linked to a high level of guilt, worry, fear, and depression. Neuroticism is one of the Big Five Personality Traits recognized by psychologists, along with extroversion, openness to experience, conscientiousness, and agreeableness. As with all personality traits, neuroticism exists on a spectrum, so all of us are at least a little bit neurotic. Neuroticism on a spectrum On the one hand, explains psychologist and professor Dr. C. George Boeree, people who have an increased level of neurotic tendency are “very nervous” and highly emotional. They may be more likely to develop disorders like “phobias, obsessive thoughts, compulsions, and depression.” Those with “low neuroticism” would be considered more emotionally stable. Individuals high in neuroticism more often experience dissatisfaction with their lives as they are more prone to negative emotions such as anxiety, depression, and anger.“ Individuals struggling with increased levels of neuroticism can overthink and look for the ‘worst case scenario’ in many aspects of their lives. These individuals are, sometimes, viewed by others as excessively negative. It’s not always the case that they are negative but more overly cautious.” Minkyung Chung, MS LMHC Additionally, neuroticism largely refers to the way people experience negative emotions when faced with stress. As clinical psychologist Kristin Naragon-Gainey, PhD, associate professor of psychology at The University of Buffalo said: “Two people could be faced with the same situation and the neurotic one will put a negative spin on the experience and produce a stronger reaction to stress — with feelings like sadness, anxiety, fear, hostility, irritability, and anger,” Often, individuals with a neurotic personality trait produce a level of worry or sadness that doesn’t necessarily match the severity of the issue they’re faced with. How neuroticism is measured Neuroticism is measured by the Big Five personality assessment that asks individuals to rate statements according to how well it describes them. The statements, based on how the participant responds, will assess specific dimensions of their personality. For example, the assessment taker will rate an array of statements about how much they typically worry, whether they are easily disturbed, experience mood swings, are easily irritated, or are prone to feeling blue. In the most recent version of the Big Five personality assessment, neuroticism is separated into three categories: anxiety, depression, and emotional volatility. Neuroticism scores are largely based on how an individual rates statements within these subcategories; higher ratings suggest a higher degree of neuroticism. The term neurosis originated in the 18th century as a way to label a variety of psychological disorders that couldn’t be traced to a single cause. Though useful at the time, the label has come to be viewed as vague and ill–defined. It was seen as a psychological factor disrupting one’s quality of life, often including obsessive thoughts, anxiety, and other similar symptoms. In 1980, the term “neurosis” was removed from the American Psychiatric Association’s Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-III), and most therapists and experts today no longer use the term to diagnose or describe the personality of their clients. Instead, neuroses are now diagnosed as depressive or anxiety disorders. Neurosis is often mistakenly confused with neuroticism, which as described above, is a personality trait that refers to anxiety, negativity, and self-doubt. It is also worth noting that the term “neurotic” has also fallen out of favor in psychological circles to avoid this confusion. How can you tell if you’re a little more neurotic than the rest of the world? Well, one main difference between someone who simply has neurotic personality traits and someone who has developed psychosis is that even the most highly neurotic person is clearly — maybe even painfully so — aware of this tendency in their personality. Of course, neuroticism looks different for different people, but most people with highly neurotic personality traits share some combination of these defining characteristics, including: A tendency toward mood disorders like anxiety and depression Hyper-awareness and self-consciousness of one’s mistakes and imperfections A propensity to dwell on negative feelings and emotions An expectation that the worst outcome in any situation is the one most likely to occur Highly reactive to stress and emotional upset Prone to mood swings and emotional instability Compulsive, and may play the same scenario in one’s head over and over Prone to hypochondria and panic disorder May be more likely to adopt maladaptive behaviors, such as self-medication with alcohol, food, or other substances If your neurotic tendency is causing you distress or pushing you toward depression, anxiety, phobias, or addictions you should certainly consider seeking counseling or therapy to help manage your feelings and move toward emotional stability. Therapy can help you effectively manage stress and anxiety, which may help you prevent neurotic behavior. But remember, being “neurotic” is not a medical condition or even a diagnosable mood disorder. It is a personality trait and a state of being that some of us tend to have more of than others. Living with a higher dose of neuroticism than most people can be challenging due to the negative emotions you may feel on a regular basis. However, therapy modalities like online cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) have been helpful for people who feel that their neurotic traits are taking over. From the examples provided, it might seem like neurotic behavior is wholly negative, but rest assured that having a small and manageable amount of neuroticism in your life can actually be a good thing. “It’s important to find ways to redefine an individual’s particular neurotic behavior from something that is stigmatized as negative, to something that can be a benefit for them. Helping this process allows for individuals to gain more confidence in the specific tendencies and accept that this is part of who they are, BUT it doesn’t define them completely. There’s nothing wrong with being different.” Minkyung Chung, MS, LMHC Rumination may lead to strong attention to detail As Daniel Nettle, who wrote the book Personality: What Makes You the Way You Are, explains, neurotic people are “strivers” and tend to have an inner, self-directed drive to succeed. In addition, the tendency toward “rumination” that is often wrapped up in neuroses can be an asset if you are working in a detail-oriented job or one that requires in-depth thinking and analysis. Stress management Neurotic people can also be healthier than others, especially if they have conscientiousness as well. Nicholas A. Turiano Ph.D., a postdoctoral fellow in the Department of Psychiatry at the University of Rochester Medical Center, says that these individuals “have fewer chronic health conditions, they have healthier body weights, and they have lower levels of inflammation.” Healthy neurotics are also better equipped to deal with stressful situations. As Turiano says “The healthy neurotic individuals somehow find a way to channel that anxiety they have to motivate them to do good work,” Turiano says. Emotional depth Additionally, since neurotic people are more prone to negative feelings, Dr. Naragon-Gainey argues that they can also possess more emotional depth, “They have more experience handling negative emotions, which, though difficult, can also make them deeper, and facilitate empathy and understanding for other people’s struggles,” she explained. More cautious of risky situations Finally, neurotic personalities may also have had evolutionary advantages, as explained in a paper published in Evolution and Human Behavior. While people who are neurotic may be more likely to exhibit signs of depression and anxiety, they are traditionally “more risk-averse and vigilant concerning environmental dangers,” which certainly may have helped our “neurotic” ancestors survive adversity. It’s no fun when your neurotic tendencies take over and make you miserable, but being high on neuroticism is nothing to be ashamed of. Some even take it as a compliment; many of the most creative and successful people out there tend to be on the neurotic side of things. It’s all a matter of keeping your neuroticism in perspective, using it to your advantage, seeking help if it gets out of hand, and making sure to maintain a healthy sense of humor about it all. It is also worth noting that personality traits have been shown to be malleable; they can change with time and often shift with major life events such as moving, getting married, or having a child. Nothing is set in stone. If you’re looking for ways to become less neurotic, try exercising for at least thirty minutes a day, engaging in mindfulness, reframing your thoughts, and doing deep-breathing exercises. These techniques can help limit spiraling, negative thoughts and ground you in the present. By participating in prosocial activities such as volunteer work, you can also foster a sense of gratitude, avoid pessimistic ruminations, and increase personal satisfaction. The takeaway Being a bit higher on the neuroticism scale than others is perfectly fine — think of all the wonderfully neurotic comics who make us laugh — and might even be a good thing. Be proud and confident of your personality traits, even as you’re on the lookout for negative impacts on behavior. If you feel like aspects of your personality are hard to live with, hindering your daily life, or are becoming frustrating, meeting with a therapist can help. Whether you choose in-person, or online therapy, a licensed therapist can work with you to distinguish problematic behavioral patterns and provide actionable ways you can work on better navigating challenges and problematic thoughts. Talkspace articles are written by experienced mental health-wellness contributors; they are grounded in scientific research and evidence-based practices. Articles are extensively reviewed by our team of clinical experts (therapists and psychiatrists of various specialties) to ensure content is accurate and on par with current industry standards. Our goal at Talkspace is to provide the most up-to-date, valuable, and objective information on mental health-related topics in order to help readers make informed decisions. Articles contain trusted third-party sources that are either directly linked to in the text or listed at the bottom to take readers directly to the source. Talkspace mental health services Convenient and secure online therapy from the comfort of your home Psychiatric treatment from a licensed prescriber Relationship-centered therapy that connects you and your partner Specialized online therapy for ages 13-17 The word neuroses was originally coined in the 18th century to label a range of psychological disorders that could not usually be linked to a physical cause. It is often confused for neuroticism, a personality trait.There is no single definition of neurosis. Neurosis was, until recently, a diagnosable psychological disorder that interferes with quality of life without disrupting an individual’s perception of reality.Some psychologists and psychiatrists use the term neurosis to refer to anxious symptoms and behaviors. Other doctors use the term to describe a spectrum of mental illnesses outside of psychotic disorders. Psychoanalysts, such as Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung, described the thought process itself using the term neurosis.This article will discuss how neuroticism differs from neuroses and personality disorders, as well as how to recognize the signs of an anxiety disorder similar to neuroses. It will also give a few tips on handling some of the psychological effects of neuroticism.“Neuroses” is a term used in many different ways related to abnormal psychological processes.Neuroticism has been used to describe a personality trait that does not impair everyday function.Neuroticism is one of the Big Five personality traits found in personality tests across a range of cultures.Neurosis is no longer used as a diagnosed, and neuroses are now diagnosed as depressive or anxiety disorders.Although disused, the neurosis diagnosis is important for understanding how psychological disorders are treated today.Share on PinterestNeuroticism is considered a personality trait rather than a medical condition.Neuroticism is a long-term tendency to be in a negative or anxious emotional state. It is not a medical condition but a personality trait. People often confuse this with neurosis.Neuroticism is one of the traits that make up the five-factor model of personality alongside extraversion, agreeability, conscientiousness, and openness. This model is used in personality evaluations and tests across a wide range of cultures.People with neuroticism tend to have more depressed moods and suffer from feelings of guilt, envy, anger, and anxiety more frequently and more severely than other individuals.They can be particularly sensitive to environmental stress. People with neuroticism may see everyday situations as menacing and major. Frustrations that may be experienced by others as trivial may become problematic and lead to despair.An individual with neuroticism may be self-conscious and shy. They may tend to internalize phobias and other neurotic traits, such as anxiety, panic, aggression, negativity, and depression. Neuroticism is an ongoing emotional state defined by these negative reactions and feelings.Despite not qualifying as a diagnosis, psychologists and psychiatrists do not dismiss a personality that shows a heavy tilt towards neuroticism as unimportant for mental wellbeing. Dr. Benjamin B. Lahey, of the University of Chicago’s Departments of Health Studies and Psychiatry and Behavioral Neuroscience, said in a 2009 manuscript:“Although not widely appreciated, there is growing evidence that neuroticism is a psychological trait of profound public health significance. Neuroticism is a robust correlate and predictor of many different mental and physical disorders, comorbidity among them, and the frequency of mental and general health service use.”While neuroticism is not a diagnosis, or even a concern in an otherwise well-balanced personality, having it can feed into different mental and physical health problems.Neurosis is complex, and research offers more than one explanation. However, it is different from neuroticism.In basic terms, neurosis is a disorder involving obsessive thoughts or anxiety, while neuroticism is a personality trait that does not have the same negative impact on everyday living as an anxious condition. In modern non-medical texts, the two are often used with the same meaning, but this is inaccurate.The term “neurosis” is rarely used by modern psychologists, as they consider it to be outdated and vague.Scientists do not agree on what constitutes neurosis, although there are common traits that have been explored over the centuries.Emotional instability: According to Hans Jürgen Eysenck (1916-1997), a German-British psychologist, neurosis is defined by emotional instability.A general affection of the nervous system: Neurosis was first used by Dr. William Kullen, from Scotland, in 1769. He maintained the term refers to “disorders of sense and motion” caused by “a general affection of the nervous system.” For Dr. Kullen, this includes coma and epilepsy.No interference with rational thought or ability to function: More recently, neurosis refers to mental disorders that do not interfere with rational thought or the individual’s ability to function, even though they can cause distress.Caused by an unpleasant experience: According to Sigmund Freud (1856-1939), a famous Austrian neurologist who founded the discipline of psychoanalysis, neurosis is a coping strategy caused by unsuccessfully repressed emotions from past experiences.These emotions overwhelm or interfere with current experience. He gave the example of an overwhelming fear of dogs that may have resulted from a dog-attack earlier in life.A conflict between two psychic events: Carl Gustav Jung (1875-1961) was a Swiss psychiatrist who founded analytical psychology. He believed that a neurosis was a clash of conscious and unconscious events in the mind.These stances on neurosis confirm that it is seen as an ailment, and is normally discussed with an aim to finding the cause of and treating the condition. While a personality test can confirm that a person has neuroticism, it is not a disease or condition and cannot be “treated.”Psychosis is also different from neuroticism, although some have suggested that it may become a feature of neuroticism.Psychosis causes a person to perceive or interpret what they see and experience in a different way to those around them. It interferes with their ability to function in a social context.Symptoms of psychosis include hallucinations and delusions.It can also be triggered by the misuse of some substances, such as alcohol and drugs, whether illegal or prescribed.In recent years, scientists have questioned the distinction between neurosis and psychosis, as psychosis can develop from neurosis.In 2002, researchers looking at data for nearly 4,000 people concluded that “neuroticism increases the risk for development of psychotic symptoms.”There are a few different types of neurosis. Here are some examples.Anxious neurosis: Extreme anxiety and worry characterize this type of neurosis, as well as panic attacks and physical symptoms such as tremors and sweating.Depressive neurosis: This consists of ongoing and profound sadness, often coupled with losing interest in activities that once provided pleasure.Obsessive-compulsive neurosis: This condition involves repeating intrusive thoughts, behaviors, or mental acts. Both repeating and being deprived of these cues can cause distress.War or combat neurosis: Now known as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), this involves excessive stress and inability to function in everyday life after experiencing deeply traumatic events.Neurosis was often used to describe diseases in which the nervous system is not functioning correctly, and no lesions show to explain the dysfunction.Neurosis is not currently diagnosed by healthcare professionals.Psychologists and psychiatrists now place symptoms that resemble those in neurosis within the category of depressive disorders or anxiety. However, some psychoanalysts still use the term.Neuroticism, on the other hand, can be identified and scored by personality tests.When taking a personality test, an individual can get low, medium, or high scores for neuroticism. People with low scores are more emotionally stable and manage to deal with stress more successfully than those with high scores.Neurosis would be treated with standard psychological care. Conditions that are now diagnosed differently, such as depressive disorder, would have been treated using the same methods as today when neurosis was used an active diagnosisTreatment can include psychotherapy, psychoactive drugs, and relaxation exercises, such as deep breathing.Other methods include cognitive behavioral therapy, which adjusts the faulty psychological mechanisms that respond to the environment to react as they should. Creative therapies, such as art therapy or music therapy, have also been used to tackle mental disturbances similar to neuroses.Psychologists and psychiatrists have been trying to label neuroses for centuries without agreeing on a definition.Although no longer used, the neuroses diagnosis was an important first step to understanding and treating the psychological disorders of today.Neuroticism is not a medical problem, and its negative associations are misleading. It is a universal personality trait and is healthy as part of a balanced personality profile.DepressionMental HealthAnxiety / StressPsychology / PsychiatryMedical News Today has strict sourcing guidelines and relies on peer-reviewed studies, academic research institutions, and medical journals and associations. We only use quality, credible sources to ensure content accuracy and integrity. You can learn more about how we ensure our content is accurate and current by reading our editorial policy.Barlow, D. 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Social psychiatry and psychiatric epidemiology, 37(1):1-6 B. B. (2009, December 11). Public health significance of neuroticism. American Psychologist, 64(4), 241-256 R. L. C. & Kumari, V. (2016, December). Hans Eysenck's interface between the brain and personality: Modern evidence on the cognitive neuroscience of personality. Personality and Individual Differences, 103, 74-81 – Origins, categories, causes, diagnosis, treatment. (n.d.) . (2016, December 23) S. (1986). Neurotic depression and DSM-III [Abstract]. Acta Psychiatrica Scandinavica, 328, 31-4 Neuroticism is the trait disposition to experience negative affects, including anger, anxiety, self-consciousness, irritability, emotional instability, and depression1. Persons with elevated levels of neuroticism respond poorly to environmental stress, interpret ordinary situations as threatening, and can experience minor frustrations as hopelessly overwhelming. Neuroticism is one of the more well established and empirically validated personality trait domains, with a substantial body of research to support its heritability, childhood antecedents, temporal stability across the life span, and universal presence1, 2. Neuroticism has enormous public health implications3. It provides a dispositional vulnerability for a wide array of different forms of psychopathology, including anxiety, mood, substance, somatic symptom, and eating disorders1, 4. Many instances of maladaptive substance use are efforts to quell or quash the dismay, anxiousness, dysphoria, and emotional instability of neuroticism. Clinically significant episodes of anxiety and depressed mood states will often represent an interaction of the trait or temperament of neuroticism with a life stressor1. Neuroticism is comparably associated with a wide array of physical maladies, such as cardiac problems, disrupted immune functioning, asthma, atopic eczema, irritable bowel syndrome, and even increased risk for mortality2. The relationship of neuroticism to physical problems is both direct and indirect, in that neuroticism provides a vulnerability for the development of these conditions, as well as a disposition to exaggerate their importance and a failure to respond effectively to their treatment. Neuroticism is also associated with a diminished quality of life, including feelings of ill-will, excessive worry, occupational failure, and marital dissatisfaction5. High levels of neuroticism will contribute to poor work performance due to emotional preoccupation, exhaustion, and distraction. Similar to the duel-edged effect of neuroticism on physical conditions, high levels of neuroticism will result in actual impairment to marital relationships but also subjective feelings of marital dissatisfaction even when there is no objective basis for such feelings, which can though in turn lead to actual spousal frustration and withdrawal. Given the contribution of neuroticism to so many negative life outcomes, it has been recommended that the general population be screened for clinically significant levels of neuroticism during routine medical visits1, 6. Screening in the absence of available treatment would be problematic. However, neuroticism is responsive to pharmacologic intervention1. Pharmacotherapy can and does effectively lower levels of the personality trait of neuroticism. Barlow et al7 have also developed an empirically-validated cognitive-behavioral treatment of neuroticism, called the Unified Protocol (UP). They have suggested that current psychological treatments have become overly specialized, focusing on disorder-specific symptoms. The UP was designed to be transdiagnostic. Recognizing the impact of neuroticism across a diverse array of physical and mental health care concerns, the authors of the UP again note that “the public-health implications of directly treating and even preventing the development of neuroticism would be substantial”7. Neuroticism has long been recognized since the beginning of basic science personality research and may even be the first domain of personality that was identified within psychology1. Given its central importance for so many different forms of mental and physical dysfunction, it is not surprising that neuroticism is evident within the predominant models of personality, personality disorder, and psychopathology. Neuroticism is one of the fundamental domains of general personality included within the five-factor model or Big Five2. It is also within the dimensional trait model included in Section III of the DSM-5 for emerging measures and models8. This trait model consists of five broad domains, including negative affectivity (along with detachment, psychoticism, antagonism, and disinhibition). As expressed in the DSM-5, “these five broad domains are maladaptive variants of the five domains of the extensively validated and replicated personality model known as the ‘Big Five’ or Five Factor Model of personality”8. Neuroticism is likewise aligned with the negative affective domain included within the dimensional trait model of personality disorder proposed for the ICD-119. Finally, it is also evident within the transdiagnostic Research Domain Criteria (RDoC) of the National Institute of Mental Health, as RDoC negative valence encapsulates such constructs as fear, distress, frustration, and perceived loss10. It would be inaccurate to suggest that RDoC negative valence is equivalent to neuroticism, but it is self-evident that they are closely aligned. Currently, there is considerable interest in the general factors of psychopathology, personality disorder, and personality. To the extent that degree of impairment and dysfunction (which largely defines the general factors) is associated with level of distress and dismay, which is quite likely to be the case, we would propose that neuroticism will explain a substantial proportion of the variance in those general factors. In sum, neuroticism is a fundamental domain of personality that has enormous public health implications, impacting a wide array of psychopathological and physical health care concerns. It contributes to the occurrence of many significantly harmful life outcomes, as well as impairing the ability of persons to adequately address them. It has long been recognized as one of the more important and significant domains of personality and is being increasingly recognized as a fundamental domain of personality disorder and psychopathology more generally. Thomas A. Widiger, Joshua R. Oltmanns Department of Psychology, University of Kentucky, Lexington, KY, USA 1. Widiger TA. In: Leary MR, Hoyle RH. (eds). Handbook of individual differences in social behavior. New York: Guilford, 2009:129-46. [Google Scholar] 2. Tackett JL, Lahey BB. In: Widiger TA. (ed). The Oxford handbook of the five factor model. New York: Oxford University Press; (in press). [Google Scholar] 3. Lahey BB. Am Psychol 2009;64:241-56. [DOI] [PMC free article] [PubMed] [Google Scholar] 4. Bagby RM, Uliaszek AA, Gralnick TM et al. In: Widiger TA. (ed). The Oxford handbook of the five factor model. New York: Oxford University Press; (in press). [Google Scholar] 5. Ozer DJ, Benet-Martinez V. Annu Rev Psychol 2006;57:401-21. [DOI] [PubMed] [Google Scholar] 6. 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[DOI] [PubMed] [Google Scholar] Experiencing a rollercoaster of negative emotions more quickly than other people is a trait often referred to as “neuroticism.”It can be typical to have times when stress makes you a little short-tempered or emotionally raw.During these vulnerable moments, outbursts and extreme emotional displays may just be the release you’ve needed from long-term pressure.But when little inconveniences regularly lead to big feelings of anxiety, irritability, or hyper-alertness, you may be experiencing something more.Neuroticism is a personality trait, not a mental health condition. It’s defined as being prone to easily aroused, sometimes uncontrollable, negative emotions that don’t interfere with daily function.If you live with neuroticism, for example, you might find that your emotions are easily stimulated, and when you’re at the height of feeling, you may find it challenging to calm down.Neuroticism is considered one of the “Big Five” personality traits in psychological development theory, originally outlined in 1949 by D.W. Fiske.Like all personality traits, neuroticism exists on a continuum. It isn’t a one-time display of erratic emotions.Trait theory in psychology considers all traits to be habitual patterns of behavior with stable features.To what degree you express neuroticism on the continuum is part of what defines that personality trait for you and sets you apart from someone else who also experiences neurotic behavior.A 2017 review suggests that neuroticism is often associated with poorer mental and physical health outcomes.But a 2019 study suggests that genetic variants of neurotic behaviors may have protective functions such as high intelligence and longer lifespan.“Being neurotic” is a phrase that’s often attached to stigma, possibly due to its similarity to the word “neurosis.”Neurosis is an outdated diagnostic term once used to describe otherwise unexplainable psychological behaviors.Someone might say another person is neurotic because they felt that person’s reaction to a situation didn’t make sense. They may even accuse them of “overreacting.”When neuroticism is a part of your personality, it doesn’t mean you react emotionally without cause.Your reactions may occur because frustrations truly feel overwhelming in that moment. They may push you to anger, irritability, or depression.You may not show any outward signs but, instead, internalize negative emotions such as anxiety or self-consciousness.Some examples of neurotic behaviors can include:anxiously fixating on what others might think of your outfit at a business dinnerobsessively worrying that you did something wrong if you haven’t heard from a friend recentlyexpressing extreme guilt and shame for using the last piece of breadbeing so protective and worried about a child that you don’t allow them to play or interact with other childrenThere’s no definitive list for symptoms of neuroticism, but you may experience behaviors such as:a natural inclination for negative emotions (anger, anxiety, sadness, depression, self-doubt, jealousy, etc.)easy emotional stimulationpersistent worrying or ruminatingfinding it challenging to manage emotions in the momentexperiencing major shifts in emotionsfeeling unable to cope with or overcome challengesregular tendency to have excessive reactions to minor scenariospersistent worryingNeuroticism isn’t a mental health condition because neuroticism as a personality trait isn’t severe enough to impair basic areas of your daily functioning.When neuroticism reaches a point where it’s preventing you from living life, it may be more than just a personality trait. Consider speaking with a healthcare or mental health professional to determine whether there may be another underlying cause to your symptoms.Experiencing neuroticism doesn’t mean that there’s something wrong with you.It could mean that you may find yourself in a constant state of negative emotions, which may not be how you want to spend your days.When negative emotions are coming on strong, you can help cope with neurotic behaviors by finding ways to return to a place of emotional balance.Mindfulness, the practice of acknowledging thoughts without ruminating on them, has many applications in the world of mental health.At its core, mindfulness can help you realize when you’re worrying or obsessing over a thought. By realizing you’re in a neurotic moment, you can help shift your focus to something else.The concept of thought replacement sounds simple — swap the negative thought for a positive one.A 2016 study on generalized anxiety disorder found that positive thought replacement through images or verbal cues helped to reduce both anxiety and worry.It may not be easy to redirect your train of thought in the moment, though. Writing down a positive affirmation and keeping it in your pocket or carrying bag ready to be accessed when needed can help.A 2020 study found that training your emotional intelligence can help increase your resilience and your emotional stability, allowing you to have fewer moments where neuroticism takes over.A number of self-help books and courses exist to help improve emotional intelligence, but you can start the process by:writing down your behaviors, as well as the behaviors of those around you, and naming their corresponding emotionsasking those around you to explain what they’re feeling in the momentusing literature to help you associate behaviors with deep-felt emotionsNeuroticism isn’t a mental health condition, but sometimes talking with a qualified mental health professional can help you work through your experiences.Neurotic behaviors are habitual displays of excessive emotion toward minor situations.Living with neuroticism doesn’t mean that you’re living with a mental health condition. Calming practices, emotional training, and professional guidance can all help you manage neurotic tendencies.If behaviors of neuroticism occur and it’s interfering with your daily function, a mental health professional can help you address underlying conditions such as mood or personality disorders. Share — copy and redistribute the material in any medium or format for any purpose, even commercially. Adapt — remix, transform, and build upon the material for any purpose, even commercially. The licensor cannot revoke these freedoms as long as you follow the license terms. Attribution — You must give appropriate credit , provide a link to the license, and indicate if changes were made . You may do so in any reasonable manner, but not in any way that suggests the licensor endorses you or your use. ShareAlike — If you remix, transform, or build upon the material, you must distribute your contributions under the same license as the original. No additional restrictions — You may not apply legal terms or technological measures that legally restrict others from doing anything the license permits. You do not have to comply with the license for elements of the material in the public domain or where your use is permitted by an applicable exception or limitation . No warranties are given. The license may not give you all of the permissions necessary for your intended use. For example, other rights such as publicity, privacy, or moral rights may limit how you use the material. Neuroticism is a core personality trait characterized by emotional instability, irritability, anxiety, self-doubt, depression, and other negative feelings. Like other personality traits, neuroticism exists on a continuum, which means that people can be high, low, or somewhere in the middle in terms of this trait. If you tend to be anxious, worried, and highly responsive to stress, you've probably been described as neurotic or high-strung in the past. It's sometimes portrayed as quirkiness, but it's also marked by a propensity toward being anxious, self-doubting, negative, and even depressed. This personality characteristic can affect relationships in various ways. Neurotic tendencies, for example, can sometimes cause friction in relationships, leading to conflict and distress. Neuroticism is a trait that reflects a person's level of emotional stability. It is often defined as a negative personality trait involving negative emotions, poor self-regulation (an inability to manage urges),

trouble dealing with stress, a strong reaction to perceived threats, and the tendency to complain. People with neuroticism often become easily aroused when stimulated or have a reduced ability to calm themselves down when upset or worried. This concept has roots in Freudian times but was later expanded upon by Hans Eysenck and others. Neuroticism is one of the "Big Five" personality traits, along with extraversion, openness, conscientiousness, and agreeableness (OCEAN or CANOE are acronyms sometimes used to remember these traits). These are enduring personality traits that serve as common ways of categorizing people. Neuroticism is generally measured using self-report questionnaires as part of a personality assessment. It might also involve asking other people, such as friends and family, about the person and their personality characteristics. This process presents some challenges in identifying its true prevalence. Additionally, because neuroticism is not a diagnosis, prevalence rates of neurotic personality are not reported as they are for diagnosable mental disorders. Instead, each person falls on a continuum that ranges from very low to very high. In other words, we all exist somewhere on the spectrum when it comes to being neurotic in our behavior or having a neurotic personality. How do you know where you fall on the neuroticism spectrum? People who are at the higher end are often described as having a neurotic personality and tend to show the following characteristics: An overall tendency toward negative emotions Feels of anxiety or irritability Poor emotional stability Feelings of self-doubt Being self-conscious or shy Experiencing moodiness, sadness, or depression Easily stressed or upset; unable to handle stress well Dramatic changes in feelings Lack of resilience or difficulty bouncing back after adversity Chronic worrying about a variety of things Tendency to interpret neutral situations as threatening Often view minor problems as overwhelming Difficulty controlling urges or emotions in the moment Easily becoming jealous or feeling envy about what others have Frustration or anger about everyday occurrences Feelings of fear or guilt over minor things An example of a neurotic person is someone who is often self-critical and experiences more negative emotions that others. They doubt themselves, are often moody, and may have dramatic changes in their moods or feelings. They may obessess over what others are thinking, have high levels of irritability, and overreact to minor problems. What might cause one person to score higher in neuroticism than another? Like other personality traits, differences in this characteristic depend on a variety of factors, including genetic and environmental variables. Here are a few factors to consider. Brain function: A smaller-scale study found that after viewing unpleasant images, people higher in neuroticism had lower oxygen levels in their lateral prefrontal cortex than those with lower neuroticism ratings. This area of the brain plays a role in a variety of cognitive processes. Childhood trauma: Experiencing some trauma later in life doesn't appear to increase neuroticism, but exposure to these types of events when you're younger does seem to have this effect. Climate: If you live in a climate that is prone to more extreme weather patterns, it may increase your risk of neurotic personality traits—potentially due to poorer dopamine function as a result of climatic stress. Gender: One multicultural personality study found that women scored higher for this trait in all of the 22 countries studied. Although, the gap between genders does appear to be smaller in the online world. It's thought that this is because you can be more anonymous online, which reduces worries over what others might think of you. Genetics: Some research suggests that neuroticism is inherited, much the same as we inherit other traits such as our height. Thus, to a certain degree, we may be born with a tendency toward this particular personality trait. Survival: It has even been argued that neuroticism may be rooted in evolution as, in some respects, being hypersensitive to danger or threats could offer a survival advantage. There is also some evidence that neuroticism may be correlated with the startle reflex, which is an involuntary response to loud noises. This suggests that people who are high in neuroticism may be genetically wired to react more strongly to outside stimuli. As mentioned previously, neuroticism may help people survive because they have a tendency to pay more attention to negative outcomes or risks. Research has also connected this trait with higher levels of academic success. On the other hand, a neurotic personality can have negative effects on behavior, such as being unable to manage feelings of worry. In some cases, neuroticism may contribute to the development of mental health issues such as depression or anxiety. A 2019 study adds that neuroticism was the only "Big Five" personality trait that could significantly predict participants' cognitive decline. This decline was assessed by looking at health behaviors such as whether the participant took action to maintain their wellness or if they engaged in substance misuse. In general, people who are high on the neuroticism scale react with quick arousal to situations and can take a long time to get back to their baseline level. In other words, they live with emotional instability and may have trouble regulating their behaviors as a result. Neuroticism can have negative impacts on personal relationships. Here are a few of the ways in which this personality trait can affect how you relate to the people in your life. People who are high in neuroticism can sometimes be seen as annoying. For example, a person with neurotic behaviors might grate on the nerves of those around them by: Being critical of others Being overly dependent on others or asking for help instead of figuring things out for themselves Complaining a lot Constantly asking for reassurance Taking small issues and making them out to be bigger than they are Being high in neuroticism can also lead to conflict with others. If you become enraged over someone cutting you off in traffic, for example, you may decide to confront them. If minor problems send you over the edge, you might also yell or become angry at the people you feel have caused you stress. Some people high in neuroticism tend to worry about things and then lob accusations at others based on those worries. This could show up in the form of accusing your spouse of cheating without any evidence, driving them away from you. Or you may blame friends for things in an overly aggressive way, which can hurt your relationships. Also, if you obsess over minor details and always strive for perfectionism, you might not complete tasks that other people ask you to do. This, too, can lead to tension and conflict. A neurotic personality is characterized by poor emotional stability, which can cause others to view someone with this trait as being unreliable. If you constantly fly off the handle, for instance, people may feel that they can't rely on you to keep a calm head when faced with adversity. They may fear that they won't be able to count on you in difficult situations if you are going to panic at the sign of the smallest threat. Having a low tolerance for stress can cause leaders at work to decide that you are not the right person for the upcoming job promotion, or it may cause a love interest to decide that you are not the one that they want to spend their life with. Someone with high neurotic scores may feel guilty about things that are not their fault. This guilt can cause them to apologize for every little mistake or obsess about things they've done long after it's necessary to worry about them, which can inadvertently start to push people away. While people with high neuroticism might feel as though this guilt is necessary or helpful, it can actually hurt their relationships. A tendency toward feelings of guilt can also be harmful to mental health, increasing your risk of anxiety and depression. If you have a neurotic personality and have children, you have a greater tendency to overprotect them. You might tell them that they can't play at the park because they could fall and hurt themselves, for instance. Or you may make decisions for them because "you know best." Overprotective parenting can negatively impact a child's well-being by causing the child to be more dependent on their caregivers, making them more aversive to risk, and not allowing them to develop effective coping skills—all while increasing their risk of developing psychological disorders and increasing their anxiety. While neuroticism can cause problems, neurotic people tend to be more creative. They tend to spend more time thinking about many things, including what others are thinking and feeling, and they tend to have a great deal of emotional depth and empathy. If you have a high level of neuroticism and are concerned that it may be harming your relationships, there are a few things you can do to better cope with this personality trait. Although personality traits are considered to be relatively stable over time, they can and do change. They can also be managed to help reduce their negative effects and increase their positive effects. Recognizing that you have some control over how you respond to situations is a good first step to choosing healthier responses. Writing out the things you are grateful for helps remind you that even if your life isn't perfect, there is still a lot to be thankful for. Make it a habit to write in this journal every morning or every night. Use it to remember all of the good that life has to offer. Mindfulness can help you manage your emotions by keeping you in the present moment. Being mindful provides other benefits as well, such as lowering blood pressure and reducing feelings of stress. Problem-solving involves looking at an issue objectively, then considering viable solutions. This practice removes emotion from the equation, reducing the tendency for a negative response. It also helps you look for ways to resolve things that bother you versus letting them pile up. Chronic stress can make you feel more negative. So, find a way to let your stress out, making room for more positive emotions. Join a gym, start a meditation practice, take up yoga, or get in touch with your creative side and de-stress by painting, drawing, or making some type of art. If you have difficulties with feelings of neuroticism or neurotic behavior, you might benefit from professional help. Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) is one option to help you manage your worries, for instance. Acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT) might be another, helping you to better deal with your negative emotions. It's important to keep in mind that having a high level of neuroticism doesn't make you a bad person. There are also some good qualities to being a little neurotic—it means you're good at spotting dangers and solving problems. The positive side of the equation is that you are sensitive and aware in a way that some others might not be. You are also likely to be the one who is always looking out for others and trying to be sensitive to their feelings. If you can combine these positives with some inner work to learn how to better manage your negative thoughts and emotions, you can channel a neurotic behavior in the best possible direction so that it serves you rather than detracts from your well-being. Learn your strengths and capitalize on them while, at the same time, working to mitigate the negative effects of this trait. Lots of people feel anxious from time to time. You might get a knot in your stomach before a job interview, stress about money, or fret if your child isn’t home by curfew. It’s a normal part of being human.But what if your extreme worry doesn’t go away? Negative or obsessive thoughts can take over your mind to the point that it’s hard for you to handle everyday situations. That’s called neurotic behavior. It can -- but not always -- stem from a mental illness.Neurotic means you’re afflicted by neurosis, a word that has been in use since the 1700s to describe mental, emotional, or physical reactions that are drastic and irrational. At its root, a neurotic behavior is an automatic, unconscious effort to manage deep anxiety.In 1980, the American Psychiatric Association removed the term neurosis from its diagnostic manual as part of a revamp to standardize the criteria for mental illnesses. Today, neurosis is not a stand-alone mental condition. Instead, doctors most often put its symptoms in the same category as anxiety disorder. In other words, what used to be called neurosis now falls under the umbrella of anxiety.The line that divides neurotic from normal is the intensity. Neurotic thoughts and behaviors by definition are so extreme that they interfere with your personal, professional, and romantic lives. What’s more, they tend to be your default response to even minor problems.Common behavior: You worry about finishing a big project at work on time.Neurotic behavior: You fixate on the deadline and moan, “I’ll never get this done!” even though it’s not due for months and you have little other work to do.Common behavior: You like to get to the airport 2 hours before every flight.Neurotic behavior: You insist on arriving 4 hours early, and then you ask the gate agent every 10 minutes if the departure is on time.Common behavior: Your former spouse was unfaithful, and you’re wary about new relationships.Neurotic behavior: You constantly ask your new partner if they’re cheating on you, and then blame yourself for driving them away.Sometimes neurotic behaviors arise because you literally have a neurotic personality. Also called neuroticism, it’s a personality type, not a diagnosable medical problem. Experts call it one of the “Big Five” personality traits (the others are extroversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness to experience), a set of common characteristics that are found around the world most often.A neurotic personality has little natural buffer against stress. You see everyday situations as far worse than they really are, and then blame yourself for your extreme pessimism and negativity. You might constantly feel:IrritatedAngrySadGuiltyWorriedHostileSelf-consciousnessVulnerableNeurotic behaviors also can stem from mental health problems. A neurotic personality may make you more prone to get what researchers call “internalizing disorders,” such as:Neurotic personality or neurotic behaviors do not include delusions or hallucinations, which are symptoms of psychotic disorders where you lose touch with reality. Instead, you obsess over your own negative emotions and failures, real or imagined.Researchers believe there’s a link between neurotic personality and your genes, which may pave the way for new treatments for anxiety or depression.People with neurotic personalities are more likely to smoke, abuse alcohol and other drugs, have eating disorders, lack social support, and divorce.At the same time, a healthy dose of neurotic tendencies can be useful. Someone with a balanced personality may channel anxiety about a deadline at work to frame it as a chance to earn a promotion or to team up with co-workers. Or worries about your health could motivate you to eat well and to exercise.If you manage your anxiety and stress, it may help curb your neurotic behaviors. Self-treatment may work if your anxiety is mild and brief. Experts recommend that you:Exercise every day. Thirty minutes is best, but even a 15-minute walk can help you feel better.Talk to someone. Tell family and friends what’s fueling your anxiety, and let them know how they can help. Get enough sleep. A lack of sleep can worsen anxiety and stress. Aim for 8 hours of shut-eye every night. Cut back on alcohol and caffeine. They can also make anxiety worse. Drink water instead.Eat well-balanced meals. Healthy meals and snacks boost your energy. Be sure to eat every meal: breakfast, lunch, and dinner.Reframe your thoughts. It’s not always easy, but try to replace negative thoughts with positive ones. Ask yourself: Is what I’m worried about really as bad as I think?Write it down. Track what triggers your anxiety, and then look for patterns. Learn better ways to handle it next time.If these measures don’t help, or if you feel that anxiety is hampering your life, talk to your doctor. Reviewed by Psychology Today Staff The differences between people’s personalities can be broken down in terms of five major traits—often called the “Big Five.” Each one reflects a key part of how a person thinks, feels, and behaves. The Big Five traits are: Individual personalities are thought to feature each of these five broad traits to some degree. When the traits are measured, some people rate higher and others rate lower: Someone can be more conscientious and less agreeable than most people, for instance, while scoring about average on the other traits. These traits remain fairly stable during adulthood. People can also differ on the more specific facets that make up each of the Big Five traits. A relatively extroverted person might be highly sociable but not especially assertive. The five-factor model is widely used by personality researchers, but it is not the only model. A more recently introduced six-factor model known as HEXACO adds the factor of honesty-humility to the original five traits. The Big Five traits are typically assessed using one of multiple questionnaires. While these tests vary in the exact terms they use for each trait, they essentially cover the same broad dimensions, providing high-to-low scores on each: openness to experience (also called open-mindedness or just openness), conscientiousness, extroversion (the reverse of which is introversion), agreeableness, and neuroticism (sometimes negative emotionality or emotional stability). One test, the latest version of the Big Five Inventory, asks how much a person agrees or disagrees that he or she is someone who exemplifies various specific statements, such as: “Is curious about many different things” (for openness, or open-mindedness) “Is systematic, likes to keep things in order” (for conscientiousness) “Is outgoing, sociable” (for extroversion) “Is compassionate, has a soft heart” (for agreeableness) “Is moody, has up and down mood swings” (for neuroticism, or negative emotionality) Based on a person’s ratings for dozens of these statements (or fewer, for other tests), an average score can be calculated for each of the five traits. What does your score on the Big Five tell you? Scores on a Big Five questionnaire provide a sense of how low or high a person rates on a continuum for each trait. Comparing those scores to a large sample of test takers—as some online tests do—offers a picture of how open, conscientious, extroverted (or introverted), agreeable, and neurotic one is relative to others. How were the Big Five traits determined? Analyzing English words used to describe personality traits, researchers used statistical techniques to identify clusters of related characteristics. This led to a small number of overarching trait dimensions that personality psychologists have scientifically tested in large population samples. Who developed the Big Five personality traits? The Big Five were not determined by any one person—they have roots in the work of various researchers going back to the 1930s. In 1961, Ernest Tupes and Raymond Christal identified five personality factors that others would reanalyze and rename. Lewis Goldberg used the term Big Five in 1981 to describe these broad factors. Do Big Five tests measure more specific traits? Some Big Five questionnaires break the five main traits down into smaller sub-components or “facets,” which are correlated with each other but can be independently measured. In the Big Five Inventory, for instance, “sociability” and “assertiveness” are distinct facets of extroversion, while “organization” and “responsibility” are facets of conscientiousness. article continues after advertisement The five-factor model not only helps people better understand how they compare to others and to put names to their characteristics. It’s also used to explore relationships between personality and many other life indicators. These include consequential outcomes such as physical health and well-being as well as success in social, academic, and professional contexts. Personality psychologists have observed reliable associations between how people rate on trait scales and how they fare or feel, on average, in various aspects of their lives. What can Big Five scores tell us about other outcomes? Quite a lot, at least in Western samples. There is reliable evidence, for example, that extroversion is associated with subjective well-being, neuroticism with lower work commitment, and agreeableness with religiousness. Certain traits have been linked to mortality risk. However, these are overall patterns and don’t mean that a trait necessarily causes any of these outcomes. Can Big Five personality traits change? Yes. While personality trait measures tend to be fairly consistent over short periods of time in adulthood, they do change over the course of a lifetime. There’s also reason to believe that deliberate personality change is possible. Various ways of representing major traits have been proposed, and personality researchers continue to disagree on the number of distinct characteristics that can be measured. The five-factor model dominates the rest, as far as psychologists are concerned, although multiple types of assessments exist to measure the five traits. Outside of academic psychology, tests that aim to sort people into personality types—including the Myers-Briggs/MBTI and Enneagram—are highly popular, though many experts take issue with such tests on scientific grounds. The five-factor model has conceptual and empirical strengths that others lack. How do Big Five tests compare to the Myers-Briggs? For a number of reasons, many personality psychologists consider Big Five tests superior to the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator. These include concerns about the reliability of the types assigned by the Myers-Briggs and the validity of the test—though there is some overlap between its dimensions (which include extroversion-introversion) and the Big Five. Do the Big Five capture personality types? It depends on how strictly you define a “type.” Research indicates that for any given trait, people fall at various points along a continuum rather than fitting neatly into categories. While some identify wholeheartedly as a total extrovert or introvert, for example, there are many shades in between, and most of us would score somewhere in the middle. Do Big Five tests have known limitations? Yes. Some have criticized the five-factor model for its origins in data rather than in theory and argued that it does not encompass all fundamental traits (see HEXACO). There is also evidence that current tests provide less reliable results outside of Western, industrialized countries. How to Interpret a Psychological Atlas Global maps that depict gradations of psychological traits often conceal as much as they reveal. Here’s a guide for savvy map readers. Are You Any Good at Reading the Room? If you’ve ever committed a huge blooper, you know how embarrassing this can be. New research on personality adaptation shows there’s more at stake than you might realize. AI is evolving fast—are you? Your personality shapes how you adapt, unlearn, and thrive. Discover how the Big Five traits influence success in the AI era. Should Personality Inventories Be Gender Normed? A science reporter found that it was more difficult to score high on Agreeableness for women than men and attributed it to sexism. I explain why such gender norming is not sexism. Not Just Dreamers or Doers Some people are both highly curious and deeply disciplined. This rare psychological profile may hold the key to real change. Some people are both highly curious and deeply disciplined. This rare psychological profile may hold the key to real change. Psychologists have identified four "drunk personality" types—Ernest Hemingway, Mary Poppins, the Nutty Professor, and Mr. Hyde—reflecting how alcohol may change personalities From empathy to honesty, personality shapes kindness at work. We can balance diverse temperaments for a more harmonious and effective workplace. Physical activity generally and martial arts training specifically can help modulate depression and improve mental health status across the lifespan. The Hidden Costs of Being Too Nice Being agreeable is great—until it costs you time, energy, and confidence. Learn how to set boundaries and stop people-pleasing without guilt. Being agreeable is great—until it costs you time, energy, and confidence. Learn how to set boundaries and stop people-pleasing without guilt. New Insights into Hoarding Behavior Personality traits play a significant role in the presentation and severity of hoarding disorder in veterans who are hospitalized for its treatment. Personality traits play a significant role in the presentation and severity of hoarding disorder in veterans who are hospitalized for its treatment. How Do You Read Emotional Cues? Why do people often disagree about others' emotions? New research reveals we have stable individual differences in how much we rely on faces versus context. Why do people often disagree about others' emotions? New research reveals we have stable individual differences in how much we rely on faces versus context. Neurotic behavior is unattractive in mating partners and is unpleasant in general. Yet this trait shows up regularly across populations. Here is an evolutionary key to this puzzle. Neurotic behavior is unattractive in mating partners and is unpleasant in general. Yet this trait shows up regularly across populations. Here is an evolutionary key to this puzzle. Get the help you need from a therapist near you–a FREE service from Psychology Today. Atlanta, GA Austin, TX Baltimore, MD Boston, MA Brooklyn, NY Charlotte, NC Chicago, IL Columbus, OH Dallas, TX Denver, CO Detroit, MI Houston, TX Indianapolis, IN Jacksonville, FL Las Vegas, NV Los Angeles, CA Louisville, KY Memphis, TN Miami, FL Milwaukee, WI Minneapolis, MN Nashville, TN New York, NY Oakland, CA Omaha, NE Philadelphia, PA Phoenix, AZ Pittsburgh, PA Portland, OR Raleigh, NC Sacramento, CA Saint Louis, MO San Antonio, TX San Diego, CA San Francisco, CA San Jose, CA Seattle, WA Tucson, AZ Washington, DC Talkspace makes online therapy convenient, accessible, and, also importantly, affordable. Cost depends on how you pay: through US health insurance, Medicare, EAP, employer, organization, or out-of-pocket. Many employers cover Talkspace for free, either directly with an employer code or through an Employee Assistance Plan (EAP). Most major health insurance plans cover Talkspace therapy, and if your plan does you’ll likely only pay a copay (typically $15). If you pay out-of-pocket Talkspace therapy plans begin at $69/week. The word ‘neurotic’ dates back to Freud (1924), who described neurotic anxiety. He claimed this is generated when an individual’s defense mechanisms can no longer successfully repress an early traumatic experience, resulting in a persistent state of distress. The label neuroticism was believed to be first coined by Eysenck (1947) to describe the personality trait. People with anxiety, depression, and related disorders at the time were commonly labeled ‘neurosis’. Eysenck wanted to use a more neutral label, which he believed would be preferable to those with these mental health conditions. Despite this, Eysenck agreed that individuals diagnosed with neurosis had extreme levels of the personality trait neuroticism. He claimed that those with high levels of neuroticism require little life stress to trigger neurosis compared to those without high neuroticism levels. Eysenck’s influential theory (1961, 1981) led to the development of the Big Three personality traits. He claimed that all individuals fall into three dimensions of personality: extraversion, neuroticism, and psychoticism. He based his theory on variations in the levels of cortical activation and autonomic nervous system reactivity individuals have. He suggested that extraversion, or positive emotion, is associated with moderate levels of arousal, whereas neuroticism, or negative emotion, is associated with under or overarousal. Neuroticism has thus come to be known as the trait reflecting emotional stability or the tendency to become easily aroused, or upset, and worried when stimulated. McCrae and Costa (1987), among others, have later described neuroticism as a negative personality trait involving the tendency to experience frequent negative emotions, maladjustment, poor ability to manage urges, trouble dealing with stress, and a strong reaction to perceived threats. McCrae and Costa developed the popular personality theory of the Big Five, which includes five personality trait dimensions: extraversion, openness to experience, conscientiousness, agreeableness, and neuroticism. Within the Big Five dimension, the researchers describe facets of each trait to specify them further. They define 6 facets of neuroticism that can help identify people who are prone to psychological distress: Anxiety – the level of anxiety someone has. How frequent and how easily someone feels anxious. Anger/hostility – the tendency to feel anger, frustration, or bitterness. Depression – the tendency to feel guilt, loneliness, and low mood. Self-consciousness – how easily someone experiences social anxiety or extreme shyness. Impulsiveness – the tendency to give in to cravings and the ability to delay gratification. Vulnerability – how well someone can handle stress. Neuroticism is generally measured using self-report questionnaires as part of a personality assessment. The Big Five personality test is still commonly used in much research today. In these personality tests, people can rate how much they relate to statements such as ‘I worry about things’ and ‘I am relaxed most of the time.’ Through these questionnaires, people can see how they fall on the personality trait dimensions. As neuroticism is a dimension and not a diagnosis, the prevalence rate of neurotic personality traits is not reported as they are for diagnosable mental health disorders. Common neurotic traits People who score highly on neuroticism may experience some of the following traits: A tendency toward negative emotions Poor emotional stability – emotionally reactive Feeling anxious Feeling irritable Overly critical of the self Self-conscious or shy Often sad, moody, or depressed Easily upset Easily stressed -unable to handle stress well Experience mood swings Lack of resilience Chronic worrying about a variety of things Tendency to interpret neutral situations as threatening Feeling overwhelmed by minor problems Become jealous easily Feel frustrated and angry about everyday occurrences Feelings of fear or guilt over minor things May be seen as overreacting Low self-efficacy Low self-esteem Pessimistic outlook Some of the behaviors of people high on neuroticism can include the following: Panicking in non-threatening situations – if the fight-or-flight response system kicks in when there is nothing threatening in the environment, it is likely that neuroticism is prompting this panic. Likely to display more road rage – over-the-top anger at minor mistakes on the road could be a sign of neurotic behavior. Overly protective of their child’s health and safety – whilst it is normal for parents to worry for their child’s safety, those who are neurotic may overly worry about their child’s health, which may prevent them from doing anything that presents any risks or take them to a medical professional over any minor health concern. Strive for perfection – those who are neurotic may spend more time than necessary completing tasks because they are determined to avoid making mistakes. Overly-dependant – people who are neurotic may depend on others to meet their needs rather than doing things themselves. They may overly complain about their problems in the hopes that someone else will solve them. Neuroticism and Mental Health Although neuroticism is a dimension of normal personality, high neuroticism scores can be found in, or make someone more vulnerable to, mental health conditions. High neuroticism scores in individuals have consistently been found to be a risk factor for a wide range of mental disorders, such as mood disorders, anxiety disorders, substance abuse, schizophrenia, post-traumatic stress disorder, and personality disorders (Zhang, 2020). Another study investigated the relationship between neuroticism and mental traits, finding significant relationships with insomnia, loneliness, anorexia nervosa, and subjective well-being, among other mental health disorders (Zhang, 2021). It seems increasingly apparent that most psychological disorders are associated with elevated levels of neuroticism. These links may be unsurprising, given that emotional distress is one of the defining criteria of both neuroticism and psychological disorders. Neuroticism appears to be particularly strongly related to conditions that contain a prominent component of subjective distress. This may be why the trait has strong associations with major depression, anxiety, and personality disorders. Studies have looked at the trait of extraversion alongside neuroticism and found that these two traits can play a part in the onset and maintenance of anxiety, depressive, and related disorders (Brown and Barlow, 2009; Griffith et al., 2010). Specifically, it appears to be that the combination of high neuroticism levels with low extraversion seems to play an important role in the emergence of some mental health conditions. This was found in a study by Gershuny and Sher (1998), who found that individuals with low extraversion and high neuroticism were more at risk of developing anxiety later in life. Studies have documented that those high on neuroticism are more at risk of psychopathology following exposure to stressful life events than those who score low on neuroticism. Also, those who score high on neuroticism predicted later life mental health conditions (van Os & Jones, 1999). It is suggested that the well-documented relationship between neuroticism and depression is mediated by individual differences in the use of different emotion regulation strategies. Specifically, maladaptive forms of emotion regulation facilitate the association between neuroticism and the severity of depressive symptoms (Yoon, Maltby, & Joorman, 2012). There is also some evidence that highly neurotic people who have depression may benefit more from positive life changes than those low in neuroticism. Oldehinkel et al., 2000 found that in depressed patients who were followed for 3.5 years, neuroticism enhanced the effect of positive life events. The capacity for positive events to bring remission forward was found to be three times stronger for highly neurotic individuals. How Neuroticism Can Affect Behavior People who score highly on neuroticism may find that this trait influences their behavior in positive and negative ways. Since people with neuroticism tend to pay more attention to negative outcomes or risks, this trait could be beneficial for these individuals to succeed or survive. Having sensitivity to threats over the course of human evolution has helped the species to survive, thus, partaking in less risky behaviors due to a focus on negative outcomes can be a good thing for many. Regret is a common feeling those with neuroticism have. Feeling regret can help many people to learn from their mistakes and to alter future behavior. This contrasts with those who may not feel regretful and continue with their behaviors that others may dislike. Those with neurotic personalities also tend to be more intelligent, humorous and have greater self-awareness and drive, especially if they also score highly on conscientiousness alongside neuroticism. They may be more likely to be reflective on their actions and be more creative thinkers than those who score low on neuroticism. People high in neuroticism tend to view things in a more critical or accurate way, compared to those low on neuroticism, who may view things too optimistically or unrealistically. Although this comes with the risks of viewing things too negatively, having realistic expectations can be beneficial to avoid disappointment. Likewise, neurotic individuals can possess more emotional depth since they have more experience handling negative emotions. This can mean they may have a lot of empathy and understanding for other people’s struggles. On the other hand, there are many negative effects that can come from high levels of neuroticism. As previously discussed, if the negative feelings of neuroticism get out of control, this can result in mental health conditions such as anxiety or depression. They may also respond to stressful situations in a more negative way, such as getting angrier or more upset than those who are not neurotic. Being highly neurotic can have a negative effect at work for many people. While they may be really good at their job, they may also worry a lot about their performance. Similarly, if someone who is highly neurotic receives some negative feedback from a boss or co-worker, no matter how small, the effects can feel devastating for the individual. They may respond by worrying about their performance more, to the point where they are consumed with self-evaluation and anxiety that they cannot focus on the work. They may even avoid work altogether, in the end creating self-fulfilling prophecies for themselves. Whilst extreme, this maladaptive response can lead to difficulties in keeping jobs, decreased satisfaction with life, and sometimes even decreased life expectancy. How Neuroticism Can Affect Relationships Those who score highly on neuroticism tend to, on average, have worse ratings of relationship satisfaction. People with relationships with those high in neuroticism may report that they are not easy to be around. Those who are neurotic may tend to complain, be critical of themselves and others, constantly seek reassurance, be overly dependent on others, and appear very dramatic. Over time, this can wear down those who know the individual and get to the point of being frustrating for them. People who are neurotic may also pass on their neurotic tendencies to those around them. This may especially be the case for children of parents who are neurotic. The parent may unintentionally pass on their worries to their child so that the child learns to be more fearful. Being high in neuroticism could also result in more conflicts with others due to their over-critical nature, for instance. Moreover, if minor inconveniences can push neurotic people over the edge, they may yell or become angry at people they feel have caused stress. Some people who are neurotic may also accuse others of doing things without any evidence to back this up. To others, neurotic people may appear unreliable if they cannot regulate their emotions. If others cannot rely on these individuals to be stable, they may be avoided or not offered more job promotions or opportunities compared to someone who seems to know how to control their emotions. The negative beliefs that highly neurotic people may have about themselves may lead to ineffective social functioning, which then confirms their negative beliefs, further re-enforcing neurotic tendencies. This then becomes a vicious cycle of neuroticism and social relationships. Research by Du et al. (2021) suggested that highly neurotic individuals are likely to encounter various types of interpersonal difficulties in general. Specifically, these problems, they claim, fall into three broad areas, each defined by different facets of neuroticism: Anxiety and self-consciousness: people high in this facet of neuroticism tend to be overly obedient and non-assertive. Anger: people high in this facet find that their constant anger leads to problems of being too cold-hearted and vindictive. Depression: people high in this facet of neuroticism tend to avoid social interactions. Breaking down neuroticism into its components and seeing how each relates to specific interpersonal behaviors makes it possible to see what can make life difficult for neurotic people. Coping With Neuroticism For people who are neurotic, it can feel as if their maladaptive thought patterns trap them. Personality traits tend to be stable during the lifetime; therefore, neuroticism can be reduced to some degree, but it may always be present. Some research suggests that sometimes, especially after a major life event, neuroticism can naturally decline over time. Coping with neuroticism is more about changing behaviors rather than the personality trait itself. There are ways to cope with neuroticism, such as practicing mindfulness. Studies show that mindfulness can reduce how often negative thoughts occur and increase one’s ability to let go of these thoughts. Taking a step back from stressful or upsetting situations and thinking about what is causing the negative feelings when they happen can prevent some of the automatic neurotic patterns of thinking. Asking questions such as ‘What am I thinking?’ How am I feeling? How am I responding?’ can make it easier to take a broader perspective of the situation. In situations where neurotic feelings and behaviors can take over, it can be useful to take some deep breaths to calm down. Breathing exercises can help to create some distance from the intensity of the experience. They may help people realize that their reaction was disproportionate to the situation itself. Taking deep breaths can also help calm the autonomic nervous system biologically before it gets into fight-or-flight. Some other lifestyle methods to try for people who are neurotic can be to engage in physical activity or exercise to help them burn off any negative emotions they may be facing. Also, avoiding substances such as alcohol and drugs can also help since neurotic people are more vulnerable to being dependent on substances. Therapeutic methods such as cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) can also be useful for addressing ways to react in more balanced ways to stressors. CBT involves working with a therapist to address and challenge negative thought patterns and behaviors. CBT is generally effective in addressing the specific symptoms of mental health conditions that may result alongside high neuroticism, but it may not reduce the general predisposition features of neuroticism. This means that even after CBT, individuals may still be susceptible to other mental health conditions, although learning how to manage worries and negative thoughts through CBT can be a useful tool for reducing the severity of mental health conditions. further reading

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Reviewed by Psychology Today Staff Neuroticism, one of the Big 5 personality traits, is typically defined as a tendency toward anxiety, depression, self-doubt, and other negative feelings. All personality traits, including neuroticism, exist on a spectrum—some people are just much more neurotic than others. In the context of the Big 5, neuroticism is sometimes described as low emotional stability or negative emotionality. Some self-deprecating comedians and complainers wear their neuroticism as a badge of honor, but in truth, people with neurotic dispositions are more prone to anxiety, mood disorders, and additional unfavorable social and emotional outcomes. Neuroticism has been defined somewhat differently by different psychologists, but at its core, it reflects a general tendency toward negative emotions. The term derives from the historic concept of neurosis, which referred to a form of mental illness involving chronic distress. A person’s level of neuroticism can be assessed by personality tests that ask individuals to rate the extent to which they: worry about things are easily disturbed have frequent mood swings get irritated easily often feel blue … along with other, similar self-descriptions, with higher ratings indicating a higher level of neuroticism. Some systems of organizing the Big 5 traits—which include neuroticism—further divide the traits into multiple sub-traits. One scale, the most recent version of the Big 5 Inventory, separates neuroticism (relabeled as Negative Emotionality) into three facets that each reflect a tendency to feel certain ways: anxiety depression emotional volatility How do I know if I’m a neurotic person? If you are high (or low) on neuroticism, chances are, you already sense that’s the case. But taking a Big 5 personality test could give you a more concrete measure of how you rate on that trait compared to other people. As is the case with other traits, most people lie somewhere in the middle. Is neuroticism a bad thing? Research indicates that one’s level of neuroticism—like other personality traits—is shaped partly by genetics, as well as by (largely unaccounted for) environmental influences. article continues after advertisement For someone who is highly neurotic, it’s easy to feel trapped by maladaptive thought patterns and to struggle with depression or anxiety. Is there anything someone can do to make themselves less neurotic? Research suggests that personality traits are not set in stone and can change over the course of a lifetime—particularly after a major life event like getting married or having a child. Whether an individual naturally becomes less neurotic over time or not, however, there are steps one can take to better cope with neuroticism. Can neuroticism be cured? As a personality trait, neuroticism represents a relatively stable way of feeling and being—but a proneness to worry and distress can still be recognized and improved. Psychotherapy and mindfulness practices are among the tools that may help someone better cope with distress and even dial down their levels of neuroticism. Does neuroticism decrease with age? Some evidence shows a decrease in neuroticism, on average, as young people enter into adulthood. In particular, life events such as a first romantic relationship and transitioning to work or college from high school are linked to decreases in neuroticism, research suggests. Are there advantages to experiencing negative emotion? Painful though it is, the rumination and regret that plagues many people may help them learn from mistakes and alter future behavior—up to a point. There’s evidence that mild to moderate depression may offer similar adaptive benefits. Gestalt psychotherapy and the Alexander technique can help brass instrumentalists with musical stuttering. A communication strategy centered around self-promotion. Why do some older adults handle stress with ease while others struggle? Discover what research reveals about resilience and how to strengthen it for a thriving future. Research shows that people exhibit increased depression and anxiety after only 14 minutes of news exposure. Here's how to stay informed—and mentally healthy. Research shows that people exhibit increased depression and anxiety after only 14 minutes of news exposure. Here's how to stay informed—and mentally healthy. What makes Santa the ultimate holiday icon? Discover the surprising psychology behind the cheerful and calm demeanor. Vulnerable narcissists are most often females whose characteristics are similar to borderline personality disorder and rejection sensitive dysphoria. Find an Anxiety Therapist Get the help you need from a therapist near you–a FREE service from Psychology Today. Atlanta, GA Austin, TX Baltimore, MD Boston, MA Brooklyn, NY Charlotte, NC Chicago, IL Columbus, OH Dallas, TX Denver, CO Detroit, MI Houston, TX Indianapolis, IN Jacksonville, FL Las Vegas, NV Los Angeles, CA Louisville, KY Memphis, TN Miami, FL Milwaukee, WI Minneapolis, MN Nashville, TN New York, NY Oakland, CA Omaha, NE Philadelphia, PA Phoenix, AZ Pittsburgh, PA Portland, OR Raleigh, NC Sacramento, CA Saint Louis, MO San Antonio, TX San Diego, CA San Francisco, CA San Jose, CA Seattle, WA Tucson, AZ Washington, DC