

## RECOGNISING AND ELIMINATING THE CAUSES OF STRESS

### PERSONALITY AND STRESS

Do you think that your personality can affect your degree of vulnerability to stress? Some people think that personality has a lot to do with stress, while others are sceptical of the generalisations which have to be made in order to classify personality types.

We feel that models of personality can be useful in identifying behaviour which can contribute to your stress. However, such models are usually extremes, and most people are a complex mixture of different personality types. So we invite you to draw your own conclusions about the usefulness of analyzing your personality.

On the right is a list of statements describing different aspects of personality arranged in six groups. Each group represents a personality type. Work through the statements and tick those you think apply to you. Remember to tick the statements which reflect your *actual* behaviour, rather than what you would like your behaviour to be.

Then get a friend or colleague to answer the questions for you, and see how their answers compare with your own. Take a photocopy for your friend/colleague to fill in.

The two most commonly quoted personality types are Type A and Type B, originally identified from a survey of 1500 American men. Type A people are ambitious, always on the move, and impatient, whereas Type B people are calm and patient, with time to relax. Research in the 1950s suggested a correlation between Type A behaviour and coronary heart disease, but subsequent scientific efforts to prove this hypothesis have failed.

In her book *Managing Stress* (Pan Books Ltd, 1987), Jane Cranwell-Ward added the four further personality types (Types C—F) to produce the spectrum described below:

|  | <b>Preferred pressure level</b> | <b>Vulnerability to stress</b> |
|--|---------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| The Ambitious Type ( <i>Type A</i> )     | <i>High</i>                     | <i>High</i>                    |
| The Calm Type ( <i>Type B</i> )          | <i>Med/Low</i>                  | <i>Low</i>                     |
| The Conscientious Type ( <i>Type C</i> ) | <i>Low/Med</i>                  | <i>Mod</i>                     |
| The Non-Assertive Type ( <i>Type D</i> ) | <i>Low</i>                      | <i>Mod</i>                     |
| The Lively Type ( <i>Type E</i> )        | <i>High</i>                     | <i>Low</i>                     |
| The Anxious Type ( <i>Type F</i> )       | <i>Low</i>                      | <i>High</i>                    |

Each of these models has a preferred level of pressure: e.g. the *Ambitious* Type prefers a high level, whereas the *Calm* Type prefers a lower level. The *Ambitious* Type has a high vulnerability to stress - the constant activity, with little time for relaxation, means that the stress accumulates and chronic symptoms are likely to appear. On the other hand the *Calm* Type has a low vulnerability to stress because of a more relaxed lifestyle.

**Type A**

- Has a need to succeed
- Is active and energetic
- Is not prepared to waste time
- Allows work to take priority over home life
- Does several things at once
- Is aggressive and argumentative
- Finds it hard to accept failure
- Seldom finds time to relax

**Type B**

- Is tranquil and placid
- Is patient and unworried
- Has time to think and reflect
- Does not set impossible objectives
- Can give and receive affection and praise
- Is seldom irritated by others
- Has time for leisure and relaxation
- Keeps a balance between work and home

**Type C**

- Is meticulous about tasks
- Is very reliable
- Pays too much attention to detail
- Loses sight of long-term objectives
- Is easily thrown off balance by change
- Needs security
- Believes in authority and tradition
- Likes routines (at home and work)

**Type D**

- Has difficulty in standing up for self
- Is concerned to please others
- Runs away rather than confronts situations
- Avoids conflict
- Has difficulty saying 'no'

- Does not express own needs
- Feels others are taking advantage
- Has difficulty with relationships

**Type E**

- Lives life to the full
- Needs variety
- Thrives on change
- Needs excitement and challenge
- Will take risks
- Gets bored by routine
- Acts impulsively
- Puts self under excessive pressure

**Type F**

- Worries about possible misfortune
- Finds it difficult to relax
- Is obsessed with doing things right
- Plans for all eventualities
- Panics often
- Thinks a lot about the future
- Is concerned with the judgment of other people
- Has low self-confidence

Of course in reality we are a mixture of these model types, behaving in different ways in different circumstances. Now list the three personality types which you most closely identify with, and fill in the preferred pressure levels and the vulnerability to stress for each.

| Personality type | Preferred pressure level | Vulnerability to stress |
|------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------|
|                  |                          |                         |
|                  |                          |                         |
|                  |                          |                         |
|                  |                          |                         |

Martin is area sales manager for an electrical company  
*'I think my personality probably does help create some stress. I always want to be doing something - I get very frustrated if I feel I'm wasting time and I am quite ambitious. I've got good prospects career-wise and I'm determined not to let these go. Because of the pressure I've been under I tried to adopt a slightly different approach. I've tried to organise my time differently and make time to think. The approach I've taken is quite simple - I work near to Regent's Park so I try to go for at least a 20 minute walk there every day'*

Now consider how different aspects of your personality affect your ability to manage stress.

|  |
|--|
| <p><b>Note below those aspects of your personality which you feel make you vulnerable to stress:</b></p>                                       |
| <p style="font-size: 48px; opacity: 0.3; transform: rotate(-30deg); position: absolute; top: 50%; left: 50%; pointer-events: none;">SAMPLE</p> |

**Note below those aspects of your personality which you feel help reduce your vulnerability to stress:**

## **STRESS BUSTER ACTIVITY**

### **Checklist For Reducing Your Vulnerability To Stress Due To Personality**

- Plan some idleness in each day
- Allow your leisure time to be unstructured
- Take up a non-competitive activity
- Separate your work from the rest of your life
- Learn to laugh
- Get yourself organised
- Do one thing at a time
- Aim for things worth being, rather than having
- Listen without interrupting
- Give more support to others
- Communicate more openly and freely
- Listen actively to other's concerns
- Provide more feedback
- Not reacting to situations without seeking information first

The checklist suggests some ways of moving from *Ambitious* (Type A) to *Calm* (Type B) behaviour. If you identified with the Type A personality and you think this could ease pressure for you, use the checklist to tick the suggestions you will try.