

## Personality and stress

The link between personality and stress was discovered in the early 1960's by Meyer Friedman and Ray Rosenman, two American cardiologists. They discovered a set of behaviours that seemed to characterise people at risk from heart disease and termed these Type A behaviours.

Type A individuals tend to:-

Accentuate various key words in ordinary speech without real need and tend to utter the last few words of sentences far more rapidly than the opening words.

They tend to finish other people's sentences for them.

Always move, walk and eat more rapidly.

Feel impatient about the rate at which most events take place.

Attempt to do several things at once, for example driving and dictating at the same time, thinking about another subject while someone else is talking them, signing letters while talking to someone on the 'phone and so on.

Find it difficult to talk about things which don't have a personal interest.

Feel guilty when trying to relax.

Try to schedule more into less and less time, making few allowances for unexpected events.

Have a chronic sense of time urgency.

Often state to the minute how long their regular journeys take. E.g. Four minutes from Junction 4 to Junction 5 on the motorway. Their estimates of how long it takes to drive to work are often based on journey times at 3 a.m. with a police escort rather than taking into account normal traffic conditions!

## So how do you score in terms of Type A behaviour?

Circle the number which applies most closely to the way you behave in your everyday life.

Casual about appointments	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10	Worry about being late
Not competitive	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10	Very competitive
Good Listener	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10	Anticipate what other people are going to say, often finishing sentences for them.
Never feel rushed	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10	Always in a hurry
Can wait patiently	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10	Very impatient while waiting
Do one thing at a time	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10	Try to do many things at once. Think about what to do next while on the current task
Slow deliberate talker	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10	Fast speaker, emphatic and forceful
Easygoing	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10	Push self and others
Care about satisfying self no matter what others may think	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10	Want recognition from others
Slow at doing things	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10	Do things in a hurry, eg. walking, talking and eating
Express feelings	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10	Hide feelings
Many outside interests	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10	Few interests outside work and home
Unambitious	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10	Ambitious
Relaxed, laid back	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10	Eager to get things done

## Scoring

Total your points and see how they compare with the following:

Below 70	Type B	You tend to the non-coronary prone personality. Keep up the good work!
70 - 90	Type B+	Your behaviour is less coronary prone. However, you show some potential for slipping into some forms of Type A behaviour and it might be useful to become aware of these situations and develop some specific coping skills.
90 - 110	Type A-	You have a tendency towards coronary prone behaviour although your score is not as high as for a true Type A. This is particularly true if you smoke and have other risk factors such as high cholesterol, high blood pressure and are overweight. Keep a regular check on these aspects.
Above 110	Type A	You should make every attempt to modify your behaviour as below. It is vital that you maintain a regular check on blood pressure, cholesterol levels and your weight. Discuss with your medical adviser a suitable exercise and diet programme and design a personal stress management strategy which you implement!

## The two dimensions of Type A behaviour

1. **ACHIEVEMENT STRIVING** linked to positive outcomes.

This is the extent to which people take their work seriously, are active and work hard. They are often peak performers.

2. **IRRITABLE IMPATIENCE** linked to negative effects.

This is characterised by displays of intolerance, anger, hostility and an obsession with time.

HOW DO YOU SHAPE UP WITH THE TWO DIMENSIONS OF TYPE A BEHAVIOUR?

## How others may see the different types

<b>Type A</b>	<b>Type B</b>
Competitive.	Relaxed.
Achievement focussed	Easy-going.
Fast worker.	Seldom impatient.
Aggressive.	Takes time to enjoy life.
Impatient.	Works steadily.
Driven	Not easily irritated.
Intolerent	Has time for others
Restless.	Seldom short of time.
Hyper-alert.	Moves and speaks more slowly.
Speaks quickly	Not preoccupied with achievement.
Poor listener	Unambitious
Irritable	Not bothered about things!
Appears under pressure.	Lazy

## Characteristics of the types

### **Type A**

Friedman and Rosenman suggest that Type A behaviour may represent an effort to overcome or conceal an underlying sense of insecurity or self-doubt. There is some evidence that a number of the behaviours might be genetic and also developed from parental role models. Type A people often aim to get into challenging and demanding jobs and situations – and then make them moreso! This reinforces their self-doubt and insecurity. Putting themselves under pressure leads to them often behaving in a more pushy or aggressive manner with others. Women with Type A personalities do differ in that they tend to be somewhat less aggressive and hostile, maybe because they handle their anger differently.

Many of the Type A characteristics are seen as good qualities in organisations. They are hard workers, achievers who pursue goals, meet deadlines etc although they do not necessarily enjoy their sense of achievement! They do not always relate well to others, can be intolerant as bosses and respond to stressors quickly which can lead to a higher rate of illness with them. The usual talk is of Type A people being more prone to heart problems, although this may not be quite as true as used to be thought. However, when watching a Type A person responding to stressful situations it does appear as though their blood pressure rises significantly. Type A managers do create a number of their own problems as they will typically have problems with delegating, do not involve their team or listen to ideas and have unrealistic expectations of others. Combining these behaviours with their other traits and they become stress generators in their own right.

Type B people appear to be less driven and do not put themselves under unnecessary pressure. The myth is that they are not as ambitious as Type A's. This is not necessarily the case. They may want to achieve just as much, but they are more easy-going about how they go about it. Type B's will often make good managers as they will communicate more openly and freely, involve others and listen to them, and delegate! They will harness the positive aspects of the Type A people – and use them in their teams. They handle stress in a more balanced way and do not pass on unnecessary pressure. They can focus on getting the work done – at the right pace. Another plus for Type B is that they can relax more easily, both in and out of work without feeling guilty.

There is the combined profile - Type A/B's. These individuals tend to be a mixture of the two extremes, all with different traits. When we know our personality type we can start to work on any elements that we want to change to handle pressure and have less stress. This does take time and patience is needed. It is a journey and there will be smooth parts and bumpy ones – stick with it and it will benefit you and those around you.

## **How to combat excessive Type A behaviour**

1. Stop trying to be the centre of attention by talking all the time!
2. Develop strategies to help you slow down!
3. Get organised and sort out your priorities!
4. Manage your time more effectively!
5. Learn to protect your time and say NO!
6. Become more self aware and monitor your behaviour!
7. Practise relaxation on a regular basis!
8. Take regular, non-competitive exercise!
9. Keep a sense of perspective!
10. Pay attention to your diet!
11. Be wary of cigarettes and alcohol!
12. Get adequate sleep!

## Promoting Type B behaviour

This is the opposite of Type A behaviour and is about producing the Relaxation Response or parasympathetic swing.

Some ideas:

- Guided visualisation
- Progressive muscle relaxation
- Cyclical breathing including the 1-4-2 approach
- Enhanced listening practice
- Mental distraction techniques
- Creative work such as drawing, painting and music
- Nature's tranquillisers - laughter, sleep, sex and music

NOW ADD YOUR OWN IDEAS .....