

# PERSONALITY & HEALTH

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Personality refers to variation in people's affective, behavioral, and cognitive styles — how different individuals interpret information, react to experiences, and act on their environments.

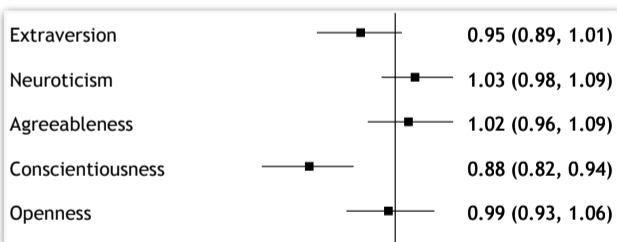
Personality differences may give clues about the origins of health inequalities, because personality traits can act as upstream risk factors that determine how people are exposed to various downstream risk factors (e.g., poor health behaviors) and how individuals are able to cope and maintain health (e.g., resilience in response to illnesses).

## 1. Importance of being conscientious

The main conclusion of our studies examining personality and health is that low conscientiousness consistently predicts higher mortality and disease incidence.

Other traits not so much.

First, we demonstrated that low conscientiousness was the only Five Factor personality trait that consistently predicted higher **all-cause mortality** rate in a pooled analysis of 7 studies (n=76,150):



We have then shown low conscientiousness to be related to higher risk of adult **diabetes**, **coronary heart disease**, **stroke**, and **obesity**. By contrast, cancer risk is not at all associated with personality—not even conscientiousness.



## 2. Personality and health behaviors

Associations between personality and health behaviors have turned out to be more diverse compared to the disease outcome studies dominated by conscientiousness.

For example, low conscientiousness and high extraversion were associated with heavy **alcohol consumption**, while low extraversion, high agreeableness, and low openness were associated with higher probability of alcohol abstinence.

For **smoking**, high extraversion and low conscientiousness predicted higher probability of smoking initiation, whereas only high neuroticism predicted lower smoking cessation among smokers and higher risk of relapse among ex-smokers.

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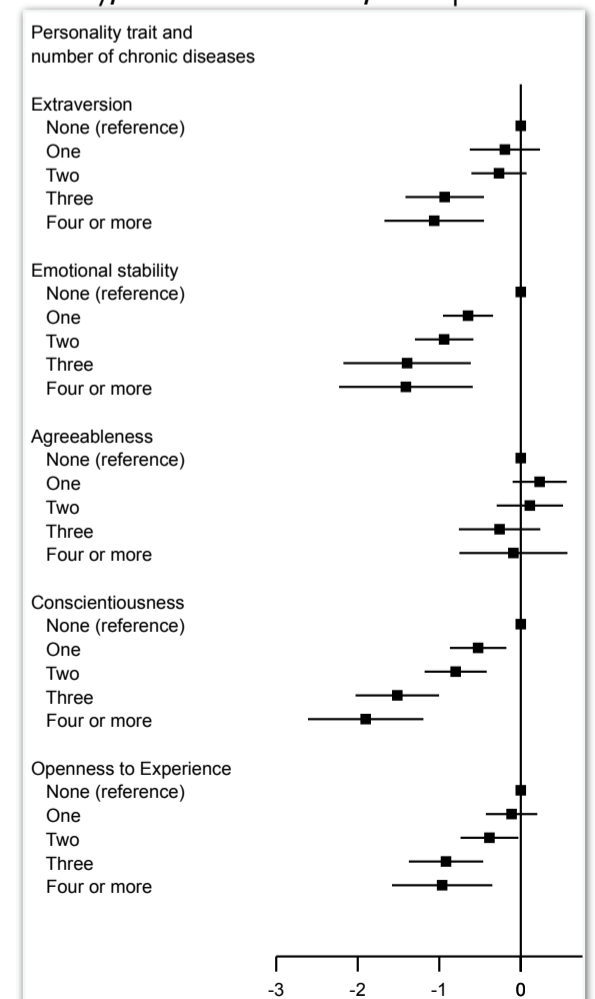
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## 3. Chronic diseases affect personality development

Chronic diseases such as coronary heart disease, hypertension, diabetes, stroke, and respiratory diseases pose several challenges and difficulties for individuals, possibly influencing broad **personality development**.

In a pooled analysis of 4 longitudinal studies, we showed that incidence of chronic diseases decreased extraversion, emotional stability, conscientiousness, and openness:



Stroke had the strongest associations, which is to be expected as this disease affects brain functioning directly. Surprisingly, cancer had no influence on personality development among cancer survivors.