

Health and Lifestyle

The Importance of Knowing Your Personality



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Health and wellbeing are important to us. But we all differ in what matters most - from maintaining a healthy weight to training to run a marathon. Nevertheless, there are some common features that affect us all, especially: conscious eating, exercise, and rest - the 'health triad'.

To achieve our wellbeing goals and to optimise our health, there is something else of importance: personality. We need to understand our habitual ways of thinking, feeling, and behaving that comprise our core self. This is vital information because our personality shapes all areas of our life and motivates us in very specific ways, sometimes not always in a positive direction.

To establish and maintain a healthy lifestyle, we really must go with the grain of our personality, not against it. The good news, though, is we can make our personality work for us. However, there is a problem: we cannot introspect on our personality to get the vital information. This statement may seem counter-intuitive, as surely we know our self the best? Not quite. First, we simply do not know what is really important about personality (its structure and dynamics). Secondly, we cannot know how *our* personality differs from *other* people's. These two aspects determine the importance of personality, especially for our health and wellbeing.

Personality science can help. Indeed, there is now a well-developed applied science of personality that we can all call upon. Bespoke Personality is here to make this science work for *you* - to help you achieve what is important in *your* life.

Getting To Know Yourself

Perhaps you are an extravert who enjoys a bustling lifestyle and struggles to find downtime? Or, maybe, you are a perfectionist who gets so caught up in meticulously following a healthy eating plan that when you have one small treat, you kick yourself so hard you fall off the 'diet' wagon altogether? Well, don't worry. You are not alone.

At Bespoke Personality, we understand the motivations that enable people to stick to a healthy lifestyle. We also know the obstacles that must be overcome on the road to success. We appreciate, too, that it's too easy to give up and taunt ourselves for not striving hard enough - for "failing". This leads to a vicious cycle of unhealthy living, and personal regret, even loathing. But when we get to know our personality, maintaining a healthy lifestyle is not hard work at all because we are going with, not against, the grain of how we typically think, feel and behave: our core personality.

The team at Bespoke Personality can help you discover who you really are. This will provide you with a foundation to build long-term healthy habits. Short-term changes are easy, but sustainable, longer-term ones much less so, especially without the insight that comes from knowledge of personality: the true drivers of behaviour.

The likelihood of maintaining a healthy lifestyle boils down to knowing about core personality traits and how they are working for and against us. It really has nothing to do with some innate inability, lack of self-control, or some ill-defined ‘weakness’ of character. Once we understand our personality traits, it becomes possible to create solutions that are tailored to work over the long-term.

Jane’s Story

We spoke to Jane who shared her health journey with us.

As a chef, the ‘health triad’ evaded me. I was destined for long hours, stood tasting food: sweet, salty, fatty, acidic, you name it, always tasting yet never eating a meal. Always on my feet but never exercising with intention. As for rest? I’d be lucky if I got 5 hours before I got up and did it all again. Too sick from the lack of sleep and the tastes of rich foods, breakfast was never on the table.

It took years to realise this cyclical nature of kitchen life took a serious toll on my health. So, I started eating breakfast. Sounds anticlimactic. Sure. But I am 20 kilos lighter from the day I decided I’d put something into my body in the morning.

This was the beginning of a long and thoughtful process of considering what I needed to be both physically and mentally healthy. Luckily, this is one of those times when being a perfectionist pays off. Setting small, manageable goals and reaching them was a boost for my perfectionism and self-esteem, and ultimately it meant having a healthy lifestyle was actually achievable.

It took time to stop thinking of food as anything other than fuel and exercise because it felt good, not because I wanted to look different. Once I committed to wanting to feel healthier and better within my body and mind, the rest followed suit. It was no longer a daily fight to pour the milk into my bowl or lace up my running shoes or roll out my yoga mat. I knew that if I wanted to avoid the inevitable conditions resulting from having a poor lifestyle, age, or even an unhealthy career, I had to make changes. And, no, I didn’t do them all in one day.

Jane understands the trials and tribulations of trying to change one’s lifestyle. She identifies setting tangible and realistic goals.

Realising and surrendering to the fact you cannot change yourself overnight is, in my opinion, step one, because until you can do this, you will keep falling back to old habits, torturing yourself, and questioning why this isn’t working? So do yourself a favour, take some time out, assess your goals, your needs, your wants, likes and dislikes, and manage your behaviour to suit the lifestyle you want, not what you think you ought to, or worse, what some other medium is telling you, you should want. Once you have figured that out, set realistic goals.

You are not going to run a marathon by the end of the week if you haven’t been exercising and training regularly.

Likewise, if you roll out your yoga mat and you cannot touch your toes in a forward fold, do not be surprised, and more importantly still, do not be hard on yourself! It takes time to nurture these practices to get fitter and stronger.

Jane knows, though, that not everyone will be onboard your health train.

Making lifestyle changes can be lonely, but it doesn't have to be! Your friends, partner or family, may not share your enthusiasm for embarking on a lifestyle journey, but that is okay. Finding a like-minded community can really help you to stay committed and reinstate your motivation. You may even make new friends!

Talking about weight loss, Jane explains.

It's about how you *feel*, not how you *look*. As I mentioned, it took time, years in fact. The first step really was eating breakfast. Getting used to putting food in my body every day for fuel, not for work, made a massive difference in my approach to mealtimes. I knew that I needed to eat more and better so I could be fit and strong. But sometimes, knowing this isn't enough. I went to the gym four to five times a week and sweated it out in classes and on the treadmill. Sure, initially, I lost a fair amount of weight, 10kg, from exercise alone. But then I began maintaining for about a year, floating just under and over by a kilo. The problem was, I was eating better, but I wasn't eating smart. And I was a social drinker, which had an enormous impact. For me, shifting the last 10kg wasn't about 'I want (or need) to lose this weight'; it was a matter of 'I want to feel better—I want to feel GREAT, what makes me feel this way?'

I started becoming selective over what exercise I did. I swapped out classes I attended because I felt I should go with those I actually liked going to. For example, I dropped HIIT and picked up Spinning. Then, when the global pandemic hit, Spinning had to stop, and I found out for the first time in my life, I was a competent outdoor runner! And I wasn't just good at it; I enjoyed it! Similarly, Pilates in the studio has nothing on my home yoga ritual.

In short, I changed my mentality and focused on what made me feel happy, strong, and energised. Suddenly, those five days of exercise became five days of joy, five days of routine—days I woke up genuinely enthused by activity. I was exercising to feel good, not to lose weight. And that is the most important message here. It is about how you *feel*, not how you *look*.

For me, concentrating on how I felt meant I naturally put better foods into my body. I needed that extra protein and slow-releasing carbs to nourish my workouts. I replaced sweet cravings with local honey and focused on building my diet around pulses, nuts, and vegetables. I eat the odd steak, sure, but I'm cautious about my meat intake as it is important to me that it is sustainably sourced.

I also changed my drinking habits; as it turns out, I don't enjoy beer—I love good wine. To that end, I stopped drinking beer, and I couldn't afford to drink high-quality wine all that often, so I soon stopped drinking so much altogether!

As I suggested previously, it all boils down to looking at your lifestyle and figuring out what you want, what serves you and what doesn't, and then making changes accordingly. And for the record, I still enjoy pizza or chocolate, but I am willing to make compromises so that I can indulge in those kinds of treats without worrying about the consequences. It is all about balance.

Jane's Practical Tips for a Healthier Lifestyle

We asked Jane if she could share her practical tips on building a healthier lifestyle.

1. Identify your lifestyle—what works for you and what doesn't? What do you enjoy? Are there areas that aren't fulfilling? If so, why? Bring your focus to those that make you feel good.

2. Identify your eating habits—are you a comfort eater? A boredom eater? Do you raid the cupboard late at night or mid-afternoon? Do you skip breakfast? Do you skip lunch? Consider changing your routine, taking up a hobby or making a mealtime schedule.
3. Identify your food weaknesses—sweet or savoury? French fries or crisps? Chocolate or sweets? Sugary drinks? Alcohol? Junk food, fast food, or high-calorie ready meals? Look for healthy swaps.
4. Identify your activity level—do you exercise? How often? Is it in line with the recommended weekly activity of 150 minutes of moderate-intensity or 75mins of vigorous intensity? Find activities you enjoy.

Jane's Food Advice as a Chef

We collected advice from Jane from her perspective as an accomplished chef. Here is what she had to say.

1. Sugar. 'Sugar addiction' is a hot topic. So much so we have already seen taxes on soft drinks², and discussions have begun about implementing further taxes on junk food and fast-food outlets³.
 - Replace your sweet craving with local honey. Local honey is packed with flavour compared to supermarket brands and is incredibly beneficial to any hay fever sufferers! If you are allergic or vegan, dry date syrup or agave nectar to swap out traditional refined white sugar.
 - A spoon full of honey will make the cravings go away. When I was craving something sweet, I went to the cupboard with a teaspoon and pulled out my local honey; I got an instant sugar hit, which was all I needed. Try it.
2. Chocolate. I'm going to say something controversial to choccy enthusiasts, but if you don't enjoy chocolate above 50% cacao content, chances are it's not the chocolate you are craving. This type of 'chocolate' is known as confectionery, and it is FULL of sugar and vegetable fats. Our supermarket shelves are full of well-known brands selling what is essentially sweetened oil.
 - If the above sounds like you, try and satisfy your cravings as per the suggestions for sugar.
 - For those of you who enjoy darker chocolate, try and go for a higher cacao content. I put an end to my chocolate cravings by increasing the intensity of the chocolate and therefore finding I only wanted to eat one square at a time.
 - If 63% is enjoyable to you, try 70%. If you already like 70%, try 85%; beyond this, dare you to try 100%—beware, she's bitter!!
3. Sodium. I like salt. I am a chef, after all, and salt brings out the flavour of food.

However, my salt intake is relative to what I cook, and I am careful about adding additional salt to any prepared foods I buy.

- Season while you cook. Seasoning your food as it is cooking will release natural flavours, stopping you from adding grams of salt at the table.

- Cook with herbs and spices. Using a blend of fresh and dried herbs and spices can transform the way your food tastes without you feeling the need to reach for the saltshaker. In particular spicy foods or any dish using cumin can be a beneficial way to reduce your salt intake.
 - Stay hydrated. When we are dehydrated, we often lean towards hunger and crave salty, fatty foods. Make sure you get your RDI of fluids every day—at least 6-8 glasses⁴.
4. Time. Organise your time. Whether you have a jam-packed schedule or need some accountability, these tips will help:
- Make a spreadsheet or chart of your standard week and break the components down into hourly slots. Be realistic to your actual timings. Do not put ‘wake up at 5 am’ if you know you get out of bed at 7.
 - When you’ve completed your chart, first be honest with yourself, and check that you have time allocated for meals. If you find you are leaving yourself short of a lunch break or skipping breakfast, look at ways to adapt your schedule to ensure you can eat sensible meals at the appropriate time.
 - Look at your chart again. Does exercise make up any of the squares? If not, can you find space? Is there room for 15 minutes of weights in the morning? Or a half-hour run in the evening after work?
 - Having an idea about when you will eat and exercise will help you stick to seeing it through.
5. Food shopping. You will have heard this before. Do not go shopping on an empty stomach.
- Plan your meals (if you can) and be conscientious about food swaps: red or brown rice instead of white, lentil pasta instead of wheat, leeks instead of lasagne sheets, natural yoghurt with fresh fruit instead of sugary flavoured yoghurts, beetroot burgers instead of beef, leaner cuts of meat, light mayo, vegetarian or vegan alternatives.
 - Make a shopping list (even if you do not plan your meals). Making a list will save you time and ensure you stick to it. If you wander into the store without a plan, chances are you will end up down the aisles you want to avoid.
 - Make sure you have your breakfast/lunch/dinner before you shop. Do not go on an empty stomach.
6. Exercise. Think about what activities you enjoy and focus on pursuing them; it will make exercise feel more like a reward for a hard day and less like a chore.
- If you do not exercise or haven’t in a very long time, consult a physician before taking up any form of exercise routine.
 - Try out new classes. Don’t be afraid to try something new. Nearly all programmes have a beginner’s session—and you can always ask for more information before joining.

- Be patient with yourself. Don't expect to pick up the Step routine or complete a Beep test on your first session. If you enjoyed it, great. If it felt hard, that's great too. It means you were trying. Allow yourself to go back and give it another go before deciding whether or not it's for you.

We think that is excellent advice from an experienced chef who has change her own lifestyle for the better - and is now enjoying life all the more.

Some More Tips for a Healthy Lifestyle

Rest and relaxation are vital components to cultivating healthy habits. It is important that while we embrace the challenges of our eating practices and take on new exercise routines, we give ourselves room to recover.

People often use expressions like 'the gym is not for me' or 'I hate healthy food'. Working through critical thoughts can be undeniably hard, and often such thoughts stem from low self-esteem. They only stand in the way of achieving our goals and are simply bad cognitive habits - as they have been learned in the past, they can be unlearned now and in the future.

Here are some suggestions for quietening that inner critic and embracing smaller changes that will still create a positive impact on your lifestyle:

1. Don't overwhelm yourself with too much health advice; it will always make you feel like you are not doing enough.
2. Remove negative influences, such as Instagram and other social media accounts that make you feel jealous or dissatisfied with yourself.
3. Out with the old: say goodbye to items that bring about feelings of low self-worth and make room literally and figuratively for positive change.
4. Walk whenever you can and utilise the opportunity to take the stairs.

Breathe. Find time to focus on your breath. Sit quietly and breathe in and out slowly. This will help restore a sense of calm.

¹ UK Recommended weekly exercise target for adults aged 19-64, taken from the NHS website: <https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/exercise/>

² UK 'sugar tax' came into effect in April 2018: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/soft-drinks-industry-levy-comes-into-effect>

³ The man behind Leon, the healthy fast-food chain, delivers a report asking the government to tax salt and sugar further: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-57838103>

⁴ UK Recommended Daily Intake of fluids from NHS Eat Well: <https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/eat-well/the-eatwell-guide/>

What We Offer At Bespoke Personality

At Bespoke Personality we understand that *finding* balance is top of the agenda for many people, but *achieving* balance is about having personality self-knowledge and insight. We are here to help you with this crucial part of your journey.

We understand, though, that undertaking lifestyle changes isn't right for everyone and it is important to care for your mental health just as much as your physical health. Introducing restorative practices can help your body and mind to quieten and relax. However, if you are worried about negative thoughts, cannot relax or find yourself in a constant state of anxiety, reach out to a mental health professional to discuss your concerns. Help is available:

1. Make an appointment with your GP, nurse or mental health nurse - don't delay and put this off!
2. Your local Mind charity
Website: <https://www.mind.org.uk/>
3. Rethink Mental Illness
Website: <https://www.rethink.org>
4. Together for Mental Wellbeing
Website: <https://www.together-uk.org>

In times of crisis or out of hours, you can access help via the following:

1. Call NHS 111
Phone: 111
2. SaneLine (4:30pm-10:30pm)
Phone: 0300 304 7000 Website: <https://www.sane.org.uk>
3. Samaritans (24 hours a day)
Phone: 116 123 Website: <https://www.samaritans.org>

If you feel you are ready to learn about your personality traits and what they mean for changing your lifestyle for the better, get in touch with us for a chat. We'd love to hear from you - and remember, we're here to help, not judge. Just get in touch: contact@bespokepersonality.com



We're here to join you on your health and wellbeing journey