

Want to be healthy and happy? Choose a conscientious partner?

19 June 2019, by Lynn Williams



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Why? Your partner's personality? Personality reflects a person's characteristic way of thinking, feeling and behaving. Psychologists tend to examine [personality](#) across [five key traits](#): extroversion, openness to experiences, conscientiousness, emotional stability and agreeableness. Typically, these traits are measured using questionnaires that help psychologists build up a profile of a person's personality.

Personality characteristics can have a strong impact on health, even influencing how long you live. [Research](#) shows that the more conscientious a person is, the longer they live. Conscientiousness is defined by high levels of self-discipline. Because conscientious people are more organised and careful they are more likely to lead

[healthier lives](#) than their less conscientious peers. For instance, they may be more likely to follow their doctor's advice, eat more healthily and do more exercise.

It's not just your own personality that can strongly influence your health, though—your [partner's](#) can too. A US [study](#) examined the relationship between partner conscientiousness and health ratings in 2,203 older couples. They found that husbands' conscientiousness influenced wives' health, and wives' conscientiousness influenced husbands' health. The same findings were also replicated in a more recent [study](#).

These results showed something particularly interesting: conscientiousness had a compensatory effect, meaning that having a more conscientious spouse predicted better health, even after taking into account a participant's own conscientiousness. A finding that the researchers described as "compensatory conscientiousness".

A better quality of life

We recently carried out a study to see if we could find similar effects in younger adults. We also wanted to see if a person's conscientiousness influenced their partner's quality of life. The term "[quality of life](#)" reflects a person's satisfaction with their life, including physical health, psychological state and social relationships.

We talked to 182 romantically involved couples, asking each person to complete a questionnaire. The participants were aged from 18 to 78, with an average age of 36. To qualify to take part, couples had to have been in a relationship for at least six months. Just under half the sample was married and most couples lived together. On average, the couples had been together for just over ten years.

Each person completed the questionnaire separately from their partner so that they could not discuss their answers. The survey questions let us measure their personality, using the [ten-item personality inventory](#) and ask them questions about their quality of life using [questions](#) developed by the World Health Organisation.

Our analysis showed that an individual's own level of conscientiousness was related to their quality of life, with participants who had higher levels of conscientiousness reporting a better quality of life. We also found that people who had partners with higher levels of conscientiousness also reported having a better [quality of life](#). This finding was true for both men and women.

Our findings raise the question of how a person's conscientiousness influences their partner's health. It is likely that partners high in [conscientiousness](#) help to create an environment that leads to greater health. For instance, a conscientious partner likes to plan and be organized and so they may provide their partners with useful health reminders, such as to take medication or attend a doctor's appointment. Conscientious partners are also dependable and so are likely to be good providers of social support for their partner.

These findings show that our partner's personality is important for our [health](#), so choose your [life](#) partner carefully.

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