

Men's Health: Narcissism May Be Bad News



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Narcissism may not just be bad for your social life; it may also hamper your health.

A new study suggests that individuals with certain narcissistic personality traits may have elevated levels of cortisol -- the primary stress hormone -- putting them at greater risk for longterm health problems, particularly cardiovascular events.

And that is especially true for men.



In the new study, published Monday evening in the journal *PLoS One*, researchers analyzed 106 college undergraduates, assessing their narcissism levels using a 40-question inventory. Students were asked to agree or disagree with statements demonstrating "healthier" narcissistic tendencies (i.e., "I will be a success") and unhealthy ones ("I find it easy to manipulate people.")

The researchers also took saliva samples to assess the undergrads' cortisol levels.

In general, narcissism was not predictive of cortisol in females, but did correlate to cortisol levels in men. When the researchers parsed that even further, distinguishing between so-called healthier and more toxic narcissistic tendencies, they found "bad" narcissism was marginally linked to higher cortisol levels in women, but it was closely tied to higher cortisol levels in men.

"Past research has stressed narcissists out and then looked at their cortisol levels, which were higher in men," explained senior author Sara Konrath, Ph.D., an assistant research professor with the University of Michigan's Institute for Social Research, referencing [a study](#) from another University of Michigan researcher from 2010.

"Here, we didn't have that stress, but they still had high cortisol [levels]. If men's bodies are always kind of 'activated' like this, it can predict cardiovascular problems in the long term," she continued.

Indeed, [as the Mayo Clinic explains](#), longterm activation of the body's stress-response system and the corresponding overexposure to cortisol can harm "almost all your body's processes," upping risk for heart disease and memory impairment.

Dr. Patrick Kelly, director of consultation liaison service and pediatric psychosomatic medicine at Johns Hopkins, said that while the new study has some limitations given the failure to identify whether any participants had full-blown personality disorders, it raises interesting questions about why "bad" narcissism may be tied to higher cortisol levels in men.

"It gives a biological correlation to a psychiatric phenomenon," Kelly told HuffPost. "It helps to say, 'there is a mind body connection.' There are real physical ramifications to your mental state, particularly if you have something like a personality disorder, which can be treated."

Indeed, Konrath said her new study highlights the importance of being aware of the possible narcissism-cortisol connection in men, particularly given that males, in general, are less likely to seek out medical

treatment. [Indeed, past reports](#) from the Centers for Disease Control suggest that women are 33 percent more likely than men to visit a doctor.

"It just means that clinicians and practitioners have to be creative when dealing with men who they think might be on that [narcissistic] scale somewhere, and be aware of possible long-term problems," Konrath said. "They have to focus on ways to manage the body's relaxation."