

What Makes Some People More Resilient?

New study links physical fitness with resilience.

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Scientists continue to discover links between [personality](#) and physical well-being. Of the "Big 5" personality traits—[neuroticism](#), extraversion, openness, agreeableness and conscientiousness—neuroticism has again been confirmed as the most detrimental to your health.

A study published in February of 2013 titled "*Personality, Metabolic Rate and Aerobic Capacity*" shows a link between a [resilient](#) personality profile and aerobic capacity. The four-year research project was led by Antonio Terracciano, associate professor of [geriatrics](#) at the Florida State University College of Medicine. The research was funded by the National Institute on [Aging](#) (NIA).

Previous studies have shown that [extraverted](#) character traits such as being friendly, easy going, optimistic, and having sense of [humor](#) are an important part of remaining healthy into old age. Neuroticism—which includes symptoms like worry, seclusion, [introversion](#), and anxiety—has long been linked to [depression](#), poor health, and shortened lifespan. What makes some people more neurotic? How can you become less neurotic? This new study links aerobic capacity with a resilient personality profile and lower neuroticism.

Aerobic Capacity and Resilience

Past researchers have demonstrated that personality traits and cardiorespiratory fitness in older adults are reliable predictors of health and longevity. Terracciano and his [team](#) assessed personality traits based on the "Big 5" personality measures of: neuroticism, extraversion, openness, agreeableness and [conscientiousness](#). Lower scores on neuroticism and higher scores on the other four traits are defined as a "resilient personality profile."

Terracciano wanted to know more about the link between psychological traits and cardiorespiratory fitness. Could it be that certain personality traits could predict the extent of a person's cardiorespiratory fitness? "We tested implicit assumptions that individuals with certain personality dispositions have different metabolic and energetic profiles," Terracciano said.

His team found that those who scored lower for neuroticism and higher for conscientiousness, extraversion or openness had better aerobic capacity and required less energy to complete the same distance on a treadmill. Subjects were tested to measure their energy expenditure at rest and at normal and maximal sustained walking speeds. Those identified as more neurotic required a longer time to complete the walking task and had lower aerobic capacity.

"Those with a more resilient personality profile were not just faster and with greater aerobic capacity, but they were also more efficient in their energy expenditure while walking," Terracciano said. "That is, they could go faster while using relatively less energy."

Terracciano says the results successfully highlight the link between personality traits and cardiorespiratory fitness in older adults. "Both are powerful predictors of disability and mortality," he said. "I believe this study is informative on the role of psychological traits in lifestyles that are associated with successful aging."

People who are depressed or emotionally vulnerable have a lower aerobic capacity and less energy according to this study. But what came first? Through regular physical conditioning you can improve your aerobic capacity. Will this make you more resilient? I believe the answer is yes.

As a coach and athlete I know first hand that people who work out regularly become more outgoing and more resilient. When you feel good physically you have more energy and confidence to seize the day. This study confirms the link between cardiovascular fitness and resilience. I believe that everyone can create a more resilient disposition by increasing his or her aerobic capacity.

Conclusion

Empirical evidence and neuroscientific research continue to confirm that you can create neuroplastic changes in your [brain](#) and mindset through regular physical activity. The latest study from Terracciano and colleagues is more proof that cardiovascular fitness is linked to resilience.

Simply by including 20-30 minutes of aerobic activity into your daily routine you can become more resilient. Running turned my life around when I was 17. After a few weeks of regular physical activity I transformed from being a self-destructive, cynical, depressive teenager into an optimistic and ambitious go-getter. Anyone can do this! It is a universal biological phenomena. Neuroscientific research continues to confirm all the ways that exercise reshapes our minds and bodies in beneficial ways at any age.

Hopefully, this study will inspire you to become more physically active, or to "keep doing what you're doing" if you already move your body most days of the week. People of all ages and from all walks of life can become more resilient through improved cardiorespiratory fitness.

Combining the latest scientific findings with the common sense held in empirical evidence is the foundation of *The Athlete's Way: Sweat and the Biology of Bliss*. If you want to learn more about the neuroscience of how physical activity creates a "Sound Mind in a Sound Body" please check out my book or blog archives here at [Psychology Today](#).