

**IT TAKES** all kinds, or so the saying goes. While the *it* in this statement has the potential of referring to options too numerous to count, according to Katharine Briggs and her daughter Isabel Briggs Myers, the *all kinds* is limited to 16. Katharine and Isabel organized specific traits into four basic personality categories, holding that humans are bent in one direction or the other within these categories. Unlike other personality labels that feel static and confining, Myers-Briggs personality qualities run on a continuum rather than all or nothing. One who may have the same personality type may not manifest a particular trait quite as absolutely as another. While some find personality typing more beneficial than others, I would like to share some thoughts from a presentation I heard in which a few of these personality qualities were highlighted in

relation to coping with the number one killer in our lives: stress.

The brain is wired in such a way as to immediately know what is taking place environmentally and emotionally. It is primed to respond to and escape danger. Psychiatrist Dr. Cameron Johnson, medical director of services at Loma Linda University Behavioral Medicine Center, explains that when being chased by a bear, for example, the adrenal glands release the hormone cortisol into the blood. When cortisol enters the brain, it stimulates specific NMBA (*N*-methyl-D-aspartate) receptors on brain cells, or neurons. Receptors are something like docking sites where neurotransmitters and hormones can impact what occurs within the cell. Receptors have also been likened to gates or doorways that only open when a specific molecular key fits in it. Receptors are more interactive than a static keyhole or doorway and when stimulated, or turned on, elicit a sequence of reactions within the cell.

When NMBA receptors are stimulated by cortisol, calcium is allowed to enter into the cell. With chronic stress the receptors will remain open allowing calcium to flood in, causing a cascade of events that result in the death of that brain cell. And you thought it was just drugs and alcohol that killed brain cells.

Stress wreaks the greatest havoc where NMBA receptors are most concentrated, which just happens to be the hippocampus and amygdala. Now that may not mean anything to you at face value, until I remind you that the hippocampus plays an important role in memory and the amygdala is intimately tied with our emotions and motivation. These are the areas where the most damage occurs as a result of stress.

Immediately following a traumatic event the brain is coursing with stress hormones and the individual, in an almost hypnotic state, is undergoing massive cellular death. Johnson explains that the stress experienced during reoccurring panic attacks can be likened to experiencing rape every other day. Both experiences elicit a destructive affect on the brain. The brain cannot tell the difference between horrible physical trauma and a panic attack. Another mental state that can cause the demise of certain brain cells is depression. Mild chronic depression can be likened to a bear that is incessantly chasing you. While most of those who do have mild depression do not know they are depressed, the symptoms exist. The #1 symptom is irritability and sleep disturbance is #2.



The unfortunate reality is that we cannot always escape stress, but we can learn how to control it rather than letting it take control and destroy us.

Knowing your personality type does not replace getting professional help when addressing major issues in your life, but it can be a very helpful tool in combating stress and its baleful impact. Personally, I found the points Dr. Johnson made on this subject helpful in understanding myself, and others, better.

**INTROVERTS CLARIFY BY INTROSPECTION. THEY NEED ALONE TIME TO THINK THINGS THROUGH, WHEREAS EXTROVERTS TYPICALLY TALK IT OUT AND BOUNCE THEIR THOUGHTS OFF OTHERS. . . .**

Each of the four categories of personality characteristics offer two options or preferences, neither is superior or inferior to the other. The first pair of preferences pertains to extraversion and introversion. Everyone spends some time extroverting and some time introverting. Introversion is not to be confused with shyness or reclusiveness. They are not related. While one can gain insight into their preference by determining in what context they are energized, around people or alone, Johnson offers another indicator. One of the best ways to tell what you are is how you clarify. Introverts clarify by introspection. They need alone time to think things through, whereas extroverts typically talk it out and bounce their thoughts off others.

Introverts need to be the most careful with stress. They require their space. One of the best ways to protect the introvert's brain is to schedule alone

time on a daily basis, allowing them to cope with stress and live longer and more vibrantly. For an extrovert, dealing with stress alone can amplify it. The worst thing for an extrovert is to ruminate alone or withdraw. They need a solid social support.

Another personality preference pair pertains to how you interact with the world in making decisions and taking in information. Those who have a preference for judging tend to focus on decision-making. Perceivers prefer

to stay open to a final decision in order to get more information. Perceivers "will tend to appear more flexible or questioning . . . Judgers are more likely to believe in a correct way to

approach something. Perceivers tend to like flexibility and options in their life. They are more likely to believe that there are many ways to approach something"<sup>1</sup>

Judgers are more likely to systematically work through data. They do not play well before all the work is done. The best way is their way and therefore one of the best ways to stress out a Judger is to find out their way, their plan, and mess it up.

Perceivers tend to like to leave their options open until the last minute, until they are forced. They love freedom and have much less difficulty playing before all the work is done. According to Johnson, chronically ill patients are more likely to be Perceivers, as Judgers will execute self-care more consistently. When a Judger is stressed, their decision-making time gets faster, not necessarily more accurate. When a Perceiver is stressed however, they may

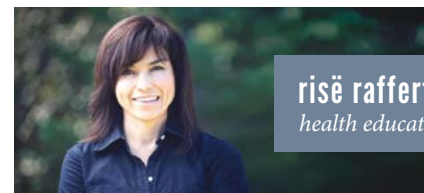
not be able to make up their mind. For them, the best way to manage stress is to develop the habit of exercise.

Johnson believes that the secret to fighting stress is to build good habits. After forming the first essential one, others can be focused on. Exercise at the same time, same place, every day for three months. It takes that long to develop a habit to the point where you don't have to think about doing it anymore. Getting past the second month, when the initial enthusiasm runs dry, is key. The effort put forth will result in a dramatic reduction in stress and the corresponding stress hormone levels.

There are various approaches to personality typing. When it comes to Myers-Briggs personality types, you can take it or leave it. The fact remains, "Not all minds are constituted alike, and we may thank God that this is the case."<sup>2</sup> The one thing I hope you will grab by the horns is your stress level. Chronic stress is literally a killer. Knowing yourself and learning how to deal with stress in a way that works best for you can be a powerful preventive health measure, enhancing the quality and extent of your mental function and life.

<sup>1</sup> "Judgers and Perceivers," *Philosopher Geek*, 8/28/2010, <http://www.cliverowe.com/blog/2010/08/28/judgers-and-perceivers/>.

<sup>2</sup> Ellen White, *Manuscript Releases*, vol. 18, p.65.



Risë has been writing on various health subjects for over 20 years. She has inspired many through her research and down-to-earth writing and speaking style. She believes that healthy living is intimately tied to happiness and wholeness.