

Common Negative Effects of Perfectionism

Perfectionism can cause a number of problems, such as:

- Anxiety (e.g. feeling nervous, stressed) Depression (e.g. feeling sad, low mood)
- Social isolation
- Focusing almost all of your time on a particular area (e.g. focusing mainly on work and rarely socialising)
- Limiting pleasurable activities not seen as being related to achievement (e.g. never just reading a magazine or listening to music)
- Insomnia
- Exhaustion and tiredness
- Muscle tension
- Upset stomach
- Poor concentration
- Rumination (e.g. thinking about a mistake made in a task over and over)
- Increased self-criticism
- Low self-esteem
- Repeated checking (e.g. reading an email over and over before sending it to check the text is completely accurate)
- Repeating tasks (e.g. rewriting and editing something over and over)
- Excessive amount of time spent on tasks (e.g. taking six hours to clean the house)
- Avoiding tasks
- Putting off tasks (procrastination)
- List-making
- Being over-thorough
- Hating to waste time and, as a consequence, being over-busy
- If you have perfectionism, you are likely to be tired (from striving all the time to achieve your goals), rather rigid and possibly isolated from other people.
- Perfectionism may also be causing significant problems at work. For example, if you are a teacher and you are striving for a flawless performance from your class or yourself, then this may cause friction between you and the students.

- Or if you are a manager, you may be responsible for giving someone their annual appraisal and, struggling for the 'right' words to say, stay up most of the night agonising and then perceive that you perform less well than you wanted to in the appraisal itself.
- Maybe you and your partner are arguing over why you feel the necessity to rewash the dishes that have already been washed up.
- Maybe you can't send Christmas cards because the effort of personalising each one means that they are never completed on time.
- Perhaps you have been forced to take a year off from your studies because you can't bear to hand in coursework that you know could be better if only you had longer to do it.
- Perhaps your life is ruled by 'musturbation' — I must do this, I must not do that.

This is just a sample of the range of problems perfectionism can cause. At its core it is like a prison of rules and regulations, 'shoulds' and 'should nots' that govern every aspect of life.

Perfectionism can be associated with a range of difficulties, such as:

- Low Self-Esteem
- Generalised Anxiety Disorder (GAD)
- Social Anxiety
- Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD)
- Obsessive Compulsive Personality Disorder (OCP)
- Low Mood and Depression
- Eating Difficulties and Disorders
- Procrastination

The Good News is that the ideas we will use from Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) have been shown in scientific studies to decrease perfectionism and other related problems.