

# TYPES OF TEMPERAMENT

Everyone has his or her own unique chemical balance, rather than imbalance. At one time, it was thought that all behavior was learned. Since the 1980s, much has been discovered about how chemicals released by glands (hormones) and nerves (neurotransmitters) influence feelings and behavior. Other substances (enzymes) regulate chemical reactions. The major players that mold your temperament are:

- GABA (gamma-aminobutyric acid) inhibits neural activity. Alcohol and tranquilizers increase levels of GABA in the brain.
- Testosterone is the male hormone that is also found in women to lesser degrees. High levels of testosterone may be associated with increased aggression.
- Norepinephrine enables the nervous system to respond to incoming stimuli.
- MAO (monoamine oxidase) is an enzyme that regulates norepinephrine. Too little may result in a barrage of incoming stimuli, causing agitation and inattention. High levels reduce responsiveness to incoming stimuli, leading to depression.
- Dopamine is a neurotransmitter linked to pleasure and self-stimulation. Dopamine, serotonin, and norepinephrine have chemical structures similar to such drugs as LSD.
- Serotonin balances the action of dopamine and norepinephrine.

## FOUR BASIC TEMPERAMENTS<sup>1</sup>

1. Sensors or on-edge people may have low levels of nature's tranquilizer, GABA, causing them to be very reactive to their surroundings but to back away from triggers due to a limited comfort zone. They can be sensitive and perceptive or anxious and fearful. Panic attacks, social phobias, and avoidant disorders can become problems.
2. Focusers or low-keyed people may have high levels of MAO and low levels of serotonin and norepinephrine. This causes them to underreact to external stimuli and turn inward to find interest through fantasy, pondering, reading or ruminating. They can have great powers of concentration and task orientation or brood and feel empty. Obsessions, compulsions, dependency, and depression can become problems.
3. Seekers or go-getters may have an abundance of nature's pleasure pill, dopamine, and low MAO. This leads to underreactivity to threat and may cause them to seek excitement and even danger to feel alive. They can be friendly, high achievers, and courageous or restless and dissatisfied. Attention deficits, addictions, and cycles of elation and despair can be problems.
4. Dischargers or quick-triggered people may have low levels of serotonin and MAO and high levels of nature's antagonist, testosterone, causing them to overreact to external stimuli. Because they are outgoing, they lash out at what bothers them. They can be passionate, sensuous, energetic, and lively or explosive and unpredictable. Personality disorders with poor insight and blaming others can be problems.

The chart on the following page can help you identify your temperament. The temperament with the most points may be your type. If the sum of your sensor plus focuser points in the left column is high, you may be introverted. If the sum of your discharger plus seeker points in the right column is high, you may be extroverted. If the sum of sensor plus discharger points is high, you may be over-reactive. If the sum of focuser plus seeker points is high, you may be under-reactive. If your point total for all types is similar, you may be evenly balanced or cycle in moods. It can help to have others rate you.

---

<sup>1</sup>See *Mastering Your Moods* by Melvyn Kinder (Simon & Schuster, 1995) for more on biochemistry and description of temperaments.

### Identifying Your Temperament

**Directions:** Give yourself 1–4 points for each item that describes you. Score items that list more than one quality according to how many traits characterize you. For instance, if you both worry and expect the worst, score that item 2 points. If you are a pessimist but don't worry, give yourself 1 point.

Introverted      LIMITED      ← COMFORT ZONE →      EXTENSIVE      Extroverted	
<p><b>Sensors (SN)—Low GABA</b></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> I <i>worry</i> or <i>expect</i> the worst. (2)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> My worries exhaust me.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> I can be anxious and not know why.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> It's hard to calm down when I'm anxious.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> I notice details others would find trivial.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> I don't like to be the center of attention.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> I push myself and then get overwhelmed.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> When uncomfortable, I get sweaty/shaky.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> I find it difficult to relax.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> I try to avoid confrontation.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> I seek reassurance.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> I often feel like an outsider.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> <i>Security</i> or <i>safety</i> is important to me. (2)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> I use <i>alcohol</i> or <i>drugs</i> to calm down. (2)</p> <p><b>I am:</b></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> <i>Sensitive, perceptive, or empathetic.</i> (3)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Tense in new situations or easily startle. (2)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Very aware of bodily sensations.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> <i>Shy, quiet, or a "peoplepleaser."</i> (3)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Most at ease with family or close friends.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Drawn to exciting but comforting people.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Total Points: __ (28)</p>	<p><b>Dischargers (D)—High testosterone, low MAO</b></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> I react quickly when others upset me.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> I don't hold back angry feelings.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Sometimes I don't know why I'm angry.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> I get angry about things others find trivial.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> It's hard to calm down when I'm mad.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> I use alcohol or drugs to help my anger.</p> <p><b>I am:</b></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Easily <i>irritated, frustrated, or impatient.</i> (3)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> <i>Critical, complaining, or rigid.</i> (3)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> <i>Intense, sensuous, lively, or passionate.</i> (4)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Drawn to tolerant or calming people.</p> <p><b>I can:</b></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> <i>Confront</i> others or <i>intimidate</i> people. (2)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Take out my anger on anyone.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Be <i>aggressive, forceful, or explosive.</i> (3)</p> <p><b>Holding back anger:</b></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Makes me feel tired or depressed. (2)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Can lead to an explosion.</p> <p>After an outburst:</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> I feel regretful.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> I don't feel sorry or I make up excuses.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Total Points: __ (28)</p>
<p><b>Focusers (F)—Low serotonin, high MAO</b></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> I often <i>ponder, imagine, or dream.</i> (3)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> I can focus and ignore my surroundings.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> I attend to details in my work.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> I focus on problems to try to feel better.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Often, my brooding does not help me.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> I <i>dwell</i> on criticisms or cry easily. (2)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> I pursue exciting or unavailable partners.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> I get <i>angry</i> or <i>bored</i> when my partner doesn't "make me" happy. (2)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> I eat to relieve <i>boredom</i> or <i>sadness.</i> (2)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> I use caffeine or drugs for energy.</p> <p><b>I easily feel:</b></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> <i>Sad, exhausted, lonely, or unimportant.</i> (4)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> <i>Dissatisfied</i> with myself, <i>guilty, hopeless.</i> (3)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> <i>Tense, bored, or indecisive.</i> (3)</p> <p><b>My concerns can:</b></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Make it hard to enjoy life.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Keep me from sleeping.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Total Points: __ (28)</p>	<p><b>Seekers (SK)—High dopamine, low MAO</b></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> I seek <i>achievement</i> or <i>pleasure.</i> (2)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> I rarely get bored but tire of repetition.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Once I've finished a project, I move on.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> It's hard for me to relax and slow down.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> I've had many <i>jobs</i> or <i>partners.</i> (2)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> I idealize people and can be let down.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> I prefer caffeine or stimulants to downers.</p> <p><b>I enjoy:</b></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Attracting <i>attention</i> or <i>shocking</i> others. (2)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> <i>Excitement, parties, or travel.</i> (2)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> <i>New experiences, people, or variety.</i> (3)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Intense romance and later get bored.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> <i>Debates</i> or <i>competition.</i> (2)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> <i>Scary rides</i> or <i>fast driving.</i> (2)</p> <p><b>I can be:</b></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> <i>Unconventional, spontaneous, or rash.</i> (3)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> <i>Energetic</i> or a <i>leader.</i> (2)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> <i>Bold</i> and brave or <i>restless</i> and dissatisfied. (2)</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Total Points: __ (28)</p>