

# Narcissistic Personality Disorder

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<http://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/narcissistic-personality-disorder/basics/definition/con-20025568>

## Definition

Narcissistic personality disorder is a mental disorder in which people have an inflated sense of their own importance, a deep need for admiration and a lack of empathy for others. But behind this mask of ultra-confidence lies a fragile self-esteem that's vulnerable to the slightest criticism.

A narcissistic personality disorder causes problems in many areas of life, such as relationships, work, school or financial affairs. You may be generally unhappy and disappointed when you're not given the special favors or admiration you believe you deserve. Others may not enjoy being around you, and you may find your relationships unfulfilling.

Narcissistic personality disorder treatment is centered around talk therapy (psychotherapy).

## Symptoms

Narcissistic personality disorder is one of several types of personality disorders. Personality disorders are conditions in which people have traits that cause them to feel and behave in socially distressing ways, limiting their ability to function in relationships and other areas of their life, such as work or school.

If you have narcissistic personality disorder, you may come across as conceited, boastful or pretentious. You often monopolize conversations. You may belittle or look down on people you perceive as inferior. You may feel a sense of entitlement — and when you don't receive special treatment, you may become impatient or angry. You may insist on having "the best" of everything — for instance, the best car, athletic club or medical care.

At the same time, you have trouble handling anything that may be perceived as criticism. You may have secret feelings of insecurity, shame, vulnerability and humiliation. To feel better, you may react with rage or contempt and try to belittle the other person to make yourself appear superior. Or you may feel depressed and moody because you fall short of perfection.

Many experts use the criteria in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5), published by the American Psychiatric Association, to diagnose mental conditions. This manual is also used by insurance companies to reimburse for treatment.

DSM-5 criteria for narcissistic personality disorder include these features:

- Having an exaggerated sense of self-importance
- Expecting to be recognized as superior even without achievements that warrant it
- Exaggerating your achievements and talents
- Being preoccupied with fantasies about success, power, brilliance, beauty or the perfect mate
- Believing that you are superior and can only be understood by or associate with equally special people

- Requiring constant admiration
- Having a sense of entitlement
- Expecting special favors and unquestioning compliance with your expectations
- Taking advantage of others to get what you want
- Having an inability or unwillingness to recognize the needs and feelings of others
- Being envious of others and believing others envy you
- Behaving in an arrogant or haughty manner

Although some features of narcissistic personality disorder may seem like having confidence, it's not the same. Narcissistic personality disorder crosses the border of healthy confidence into thinking so highly of yourself that you put yourself on a pedestal and value yourself more than you value others.

### **When to see a doctor**

When you have narcissistic personality disorder, you may not want to think that anything could be wrong — doing so wouldn't fit with your self-image of power and perfection. People with narcissistic personality disorder are most likely to seek treatment when they develop symptoms of depression — often because of perceived criticisms or rejections.

If you recognize aspects of your personality that are common to narcissistic personality disorder or you're feeling overwhelmed by sadness, consider reaching out to a trusted doctor or mental health provider. Getting the right treatment can help make your life more rewarding and enjoyable.

### **Risk factors**

Narcissistic personality disorder is rare. During childhood and teen years, children may show traits of narcissism, but this may simply be typical of their age and doesn't mean they'll go on to develop narcissistic personality disorder.

Narcissistic personality disorder affects more males than females, and it often begins in the teens or early adulthood.

Although the cause of narcissistic personality disorder isn't known, some researchers think that in biologically vulnerable children, parenting styles that overemphasize the child's specialness and criticize fears and failures may be partially responsible. The child may hide low self-esteem by developing a superficial sense of perfection and behavior that shows a need for constant admiration.

### **Treatments and drugs**

#### **Psychotherapy**

Narcissistic personality disorder treatment is centered around talk therapy, also called psychotherapy. Psychotherapy can help you:

- Learn to relate better with others so your relationships are more intimate, enjoyable and rewarding
- Understand the causes of your emotions and what drives you to compete, to distrust others, and perhaps to despise yourself and others

Because personality traits can be difficult to change, therapy may take several years. Areas of change are directed at helping you accept responsibility and learning to:

- Accept and maintain real personal relationships and collaboration with co-workers
- Recognize and accept your actual competence and potential so you can tolerate criticisms or failures
- Increase your ability to understand and regulate your feelings
- Understand and tolerate the impact of issues related to your self-esteem
- Release your desire for unattainable goals and ideal conditions and gain an acceptance of what's attainable and what you can accomplish

## **Medications**

There are no medications specifically used to treat narcissistic personality disorder. However, if you have symptoms of depression, anxiety or other conditions, medications such as antidepressants or anti-anxiety drugs may be helpful.