

Neuroticism Treatment Guidelines

Disclaimer: *There is currently no official treatment guideline specifically for neuroticism as a standalone condition. Neuroticism is recognized as a personality trait rather than a mental health disorder, which complicates the establishment of formal treatment protocols.*

Introduction

According to Widiger & Oltmanns (2017), neuroticism is a personality trait characterized by the tendency to experience negative emotions like anxiety, anger, irritability, and depression.

These neurotic tendencies can lead to neurotic behaviors such as obsessive thoughts, emotional instability, and excessive worry. Neuroticism is a personality trait that is well-researched and is known to be stable over time, often developing early in life.

Treatment options

Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT)

CBT is an evidence-based form of therapy that helps patients with neurotic behaviors identify and change negative thought patterns. This type of therapy is highly effective for treating anxiety disorders, depressive disorders, and other mental health conditions that may coexist with neuroticism.

Acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT)

ACT is a mindfulness-based therapy that encourages patients to accept their emotions rather than avoid them. It focuses on helping individuals commit to behavioral changes based on their values while developing psychological flexibility. This approach helps patients manage negative emotions and decrease emotional avoidance, which is common in individuals with neurotic tendencies.

Dialectical behavior therapy (DBT)

DBT is particularly effective for patients who struggle with emotional instability and impulsive behaviors. Originally developed for borderline personality disorder, it teaches skills in distress tolerance, emotional regulation, and interpersonal effectiveness.

Exposure therapy

Exposure therapy is often used to treat anxiety disorders and is an effective way to address the avoidant behaviors seen in individuals with high levels of neuroticism. By gradually exposing patients to the sources of their anxiety in a controlled manner, they can learn to manage their fears and anxieties, ultimately reducing their neurotic reactions.

Selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs)

SSRIs are commonly prescribed to treat anxiety and depressive disorders, which are often linked to high neuroticism. These medications help regulate mood by increasing serotonin levels in the brain, reducing symptoms of depression and anxiety, and improving emotional stability.

Mindfulness-based interventions

Mindfulness practices help individuals become more aware of their emotions and reactions, fostering a non-judgmental acceptance of their feelings. These interventions, which include mindfulness meditation and mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR), are particularly effective for managing the emotional reactivity and rumination seen in neurotic personalities.

Additional considerations for managing neuroticism

Lifestyle modifications

Encouraging patients to engage in regular physical activity, maintain a balanced diet, and prioritize sleep can improve overall mental health and help manage the physical symptoms that often accompany neuroticism, such as fatigue and tension.

Stress management

Teaching stress-management techniques such as deep breathing exercises, progressive muscle relaxation, or journaling can empower patients to manage day-to-day stressors more effectively.

Psychoeducation

Educating patients on the role neuroticism plays in their emotional responses and behaviors can increase their awareness of their triggers and motivate them to engage in therapy. Understanding how neurotic traits contribute to negative consequences in everyday life is crucial for long-term improvement.

References

- Chapman, A. L. (2006). Dialectical behavior therapy: Current indications and unique elements. *Psychiatry (Edgmont)*, 3(9), 62. <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC2963469/>
- Ilieva, I. (2014). Enhancement of healthy personality through psychiatric medication: The influence of ssris on neuroticism and extraversion. <https://philpapers.org/rec/ILIEOHSaha>, P. (2024, February 27). Neuroticism: Understanding our emotional landscape. *Dr. D. Y. Patil College of Nursing, Pimpri*. <https://nursing.dpu.edu.in/blogs/neuroticism-understanding-emotions>
- Sauer-Zavala, S., Wilner, J. G., & Barlow, D. H. (2017). Addressing neuroticism in psychological treatment. *Personality Disorders: Theory, Research, and Treatment*, 8(3), 191–198. <https://doi.org/10.1037/per0000224>
- Widiger, T. A., & Oltmanns, J. R. (2017). Neuroticism is a fundamental domain of personality with enormous public health implications. *World Psychiatry*, 16(2), 144–145. <https://doi.org/10.1002/wps.20411>