

What is Perfectionism?

Perfectionism is not a healthy pursuit of excellence.

What does being perfect mean to you? Is it getting all A's, all A+'s? Does it mean making sure everyone likes you and that you never make anyone angry with you? Is perfection pleasing your parents, your friends, your significant other? Is it dressing in the latest fashion, being very thin, exercising for weight control? Is it the driving force in your life? Is it driving you to distraction? Please look at the chart below that compares perfectionism to healthy striving. If you are more of a perfectionist than a striver, stop in the Well-Woman Office, and we'll give you more suggestions for putting your life in balance.

Perfectionism is not a healthy pursuit of excellence. There are big differences between perfectionists and healthy achievers. Perfectionists believe that mistakes must never be made and that the highest standards of performance must always be achieved.

Those who strive for excellence in a healthy way take genuine pleasure in trying to meet high standards. Perfectionists, on the other hand, are full of self-doubts and fears of disapproval, ridicule, and rejection. The healthy striver has drive, while the perfectionist is driven.

Perfectionist versus Healthy Striver

Perfectionist	Healthy Striver
Sets standards beyond reach and reason	Sets high standards, but just beyond reach
Is never satisfied by anything less than perfection	Enjoys process as well as outcome
Becomes dysfunctionally depressed when experiences failure and disappointment	Bounces back from failure and disappointment quickly and with energy
Is preoccupied with fear of failure and disapproval—this can deplete energy levels	Keeps normal anxiety and fear of failure and disapproval within bounds—uses them to create energy
Sees mistakes as evidence of unworthiness	Sees mistakes as opportunities for growth and learning
Becomes overly defensive when criticized	Reacts positively to helpful criticism