

Depression and Anxiety: The Silent Struggle of Women Who Try to Do It All

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In an era of multi-tasking, trying to have it all (marriage, children, and career), and high expectations, women are experiencing higher levels of anxiety than our mothers faced a generation ago. Depression and anxiety are different conditions, but they commonly occur together and have similar treatments. They are two of the most common mental health concerns in our society and are often experienced as a complex set of emotional and functional challenges. It is not uncommon for people with depression to experience anxiety and people with anxiety to become depressed. There is also overlap in some of the treatments, so it is beneficial to learn about both conditions.

The Anxiety and Depression Association of America estimates that almost one out of five people suffer from an anxiety disorder, making it the most common mental disorder in the United States. While generalized anxiety disorder is the most common, there are other anxiety disorders, including obsessive-compulsive disorder, panic disorder, phobias, and post-traumatic stress disorder.

The science of mind-body medicine helps us understand the ongoing connection between the mind and body and see how anxiety and depression may be triggered by a variety of factors. These can include nutritional, psychological, physical, emotional, environmental, social, and spiritual factors, as well as genetic tendencies or brain disease. Depression is a common disorder, affecting over 350 million people worldwide. It is a disabling condition that adversely affects a person's family, work, or school life; sleeping and eating habits; and general health. In the United States, the incidence of depression has increased every year in the past century, and now, according to the Centers for Disease Control, one out of ten people report experiencing a depressive episode.

Depression is typically characterized by low energy and mood, low self-esteem, and loss of interest or pleasure in normally enjoyable activities. Women are 70% more likely than men to experience depression in their lifetime. Men and women experience depression differently—while women tend to experience sadness and guilt, men often feel restless or angry and are more likely to turn to alcohol and drugs to cope. Depression causes unnecessary suffering and is a risk factor for suicide.

Anxiety disorder is characterized by emotional, physical, and behavioral symptoms that create an unpleasant feeling that is typically described as uneasiness, fear, or worry. The worry is frequently accompanied by physical symptoms, especially fatigue, headaches, muscle tension, muscle aches, difficulty swallowing, trembling, twitching, irritability, sweating, and hot flashes. Emotional symptoms include fear, racing thoughts, and a feeling of impending doom. People suffering from anxiety often withdraw and seek to avoid people or certain places.

When suffering from moderate to severe symptoms of depression or anxiety, it is critical to have a working relationship with a provider, or team of providers, who can help you choose your treatment approach and evaluate its effectiveness. The providers may include a primary care physician, nurse practitioner, psychotherapist, or other professional who is philosophically aligned with you, as well as integrative therapy providers. If you are taking any oral natural supplements in combination with conventional prescription medications, it is critical for both the prescriber and the pharmacist to be aware which supplements you are taking.

We often respond to stressful events in ways that are not particularly helpful. It is important to know that adjusting your attitude can reduce stress. Try the following tips:

- Accept that there are events you cannot control. Don't worry about what you can't change.
- Be assertive instead of passive or aggressive. Assert your feelings, opinions, or beliefs instead of becoming angry, combative, or passive.

- Divide large tasks into smaller components to make jobs less overwhelming.
- Schedule your time wisely and honestly, always allowing time for interruptions and unplanned change.
- Cognitive behavioral therapy is an effective approach for dealing with distressing thoughts or feelings.

What consumes your mind, controls your life. You can change your thinking and change your life.

References Available Upon Request

Bonnie Harken, Founder and CEO of Crossroads Programs for Women has spent the last 30 years assisting individuals begin their journey of healing. Look for upcoming programs at Crossroads Programs for Women in Pekin. At Crossroads we help you recover from your past, reclaim your dreams, and renew your spirit. Each program is a blend of lectures, group discussion, and therapeutic exercises offering a healing curriculum. We explore the spiritual components of healing from a non-denominational Christian perspective. Why continue to struggle? Tomorrow does not have to be like today. We can help you. Visit www.crossroadsprogramsforwomen.com or call 1-800-348-0937.