

Women and Depression By Dr. Laura Fadell

What hat are you wearing today? The housekeeper. The taxi driver. The chef. The mother. The seductress. The wage earner. The decision maker. The financial planner. The school volunteer. What? You're wearing them all? Welcome to a woman's world.

Everyone has days when they feel sad or blue, irritated, overwhelmed, or scared; and for most of us this is usually a temporary state. But when a woman has depression, it interferes with her life as well as those who depend on and care about her. Did you know that more women than men are diagnosed with depression? And while efforts to explain this difference are ongoing, it's thought that biological (hormones) and social factors are involved. For example, the additional roles women occupy these days are generally quite different from those of our grandmothers. "In the olden days" most women had one primary role - to be a homemaker. This is not to say women of past generations didn't have a number of responsibilities; but I think we can all agree that the world of women today is quite different today.

The most common types of depression for women are Major Depressive Disorder and Dysthymic Disorder. Major depression is a combination of symptoms that interfere with a woman's ability to work, sleep, study, eat, and enjoy what were once pleasurable activities. A depressive episode can occur only once in a woman's lifetime or it can reoccur a number of times. Once a woman has been diagnosed with depression, she is much more vulnerable to having another episode in the future. Dysthymic Disorder (also called 'Dysthymia') is characterized by depressive symptoms that are long-term (e.g., at least two consecutive years) but are less severe than those of major depression. Dysthymia may not disable a woman to the point of major depression, but it definitely interferes with daily functioning. What is really disturbing is that most women who have Dysthymia don't even know they have it! They become so used to feeling this way, they don't recognize that something is wrong. Many times women are so focused on getting everything done on their list, they don't take the time to stop and recognize how overwhelmed and depleted they feel. And if they do recognize it, they usually neglect themselves and don't get treatment because it goes to the bottom of the list, and we know that the list never ends!

Unfortunately, that's what we women do – neglect ourselves for the sake of others, usually our families or our jobs. We spend so much time taking care of others we rarely have the time or energy left to take care of ourselves. And if we take the time, we end up feeling *guilty* or *selfish*. I can't tell you how many women I've seen in my practice that put everyone and everything before themselves for fear of being...you guessed it, selfish! And that's because we've been taught all our lives that being selfish is bad. I prefer to frame it like this: the root word of "selfish" is "self," and taking care of one's self is essential, because if we don't put the gas in the car, it will eventually stop running! Women must make the time and find the resources to take good care of ourselves, or we can't take good care of those we love. It's that simple. And it's okay. It's okay to do for ourselves every now and then. It's not selfish – it's healthy, proactive survival!