

If You Thought You Had a Bad Day, What About Your Brain?



A Really Bad Day

Remember that moment when you knew it was going to be a bad day? Whatever the circumstances or reasons your mood shifted downward, maybe a headache or worst yet a migraine was looming on the horizon or you could feel the knots in your stomach starting to protrude as they tighten up.

You instantly recognized the signs – **“Its Stress!”**

It may surprise you to know that before you became consciously aware that your bad day was underway, your brain was already gearing up for a stress mode operation.

Your brain knows before you do. Incoming sensory information is being compared to previous signals that resulted in stress in the past. If these signals appear to be the same or similar enough, your brain concludes its stress and activates your stress response.

You probably know this stress response as the **“fight or flight”** behavior which has its evolutionary origin in our ancestral response to the chance encounter with a tiger.

Now, as a smart, bright and intelligent woman wouldn't you stop here and ask why a tiger. **Was there really some female progenitor which happened upon a tiger and activated the fight**

or flight response in every woman throughout eternity?

According to your brain research apparently not. The physiological response for fight or flight is more responsive in men, while **women are more likely to have a different response to stress.**

The physical stress response in men and women is the same and is usually described as the release of two primary hormones – *cortisol* and *adrenaline* which act to increase blood pressure, elevate breathing, heart rate, metabolism and cholesterol.

The brain's response to stress however deviates between men and women. For men their brains respond with increased cerebral blood flow to the *right prefrontal cortex (decision making area)* and less to the *left orbitofrontal cortex (planning related to reward or punishment)*.

Women on the other hand have the limbic region of their female brain activated. The limbic system is the center for emotional moods, eating and sleep cycles and bonding.

Does it start to make sense now? Your bad day is really a bad day for your brain. As a woman your stress is going to affect you in a significant and different way than a man.

Statistically, women have twice the rate of depression and anxiety disorders than men. Scientists' suspect these emotional disorders may be due to women having less cortisol response to stress than men, but their brain's response to stress lasting longer than men. It may further explain disruptions in getting quality sleep and weight gain.

But, women also have a **built-in stress buffer.** Because of their limbic activation during stress, women are more likely to seek bonding relationships. Known as "**tending or befriending**" women under stress seek to nurture or seek support rather than engage in fight or flight.

The moment you become aware that you are going to have a bad

day, start making plans. Let your brain know your calling your best friend, your booking a massage and dinner will be lite tonight!

By Joyce Hansen