



Back in the 1970s, when feminism was still in its infancy, the airwaves featured a little ditty for Enjoli perfume in which a raven-haired beauty scrambles eggs while wearing a tight-fitting sheath dress, delivering a beguiling message that women could not only bring home the bacon, but fry it up in a pan and still remember how to make her man feel like, well, a man. Translation: You can have it all.

A fulfilling career. A satisfying marriage and sex life. A happy, harmonious home. Kids who don't whine.

Yeah, right.

What the Superwoman in the ad *didn't* sing about was that having it all costs us big time. "The Superwoman hasn't changed much since the 1970s," says Kaye V. Cook, Ph.D., chair of psychology at Gordon College in Wenham, Massachusetts. "We're still expected to bring home a paycheck, take care of the kids, look attractive, entertain, and keep a beautiful home."

Listen up, ladies—it just ain't working anymore.

"Women can't do it all, and they shouldn't believe that they have to," says Leah J. Dickstein,

M.D., director of the division of attitudinal and behavioral medicine at the University of Louisville School of Medicine in Kentucky. "There is no such real-life person as Superwoman or Superman."

So instead of desperately clinging to our tattered, jelly-smearing capes, we need a new role model—a *new* Superwoman.

One who brings home the bacon, but isn't above serving takeout. Who realizes that with so many roles to juggle, she's bound to drop a ball once in a while. Who brings the best of herself to all of the roles she plays, but understands that she won't be able to please all of the people all of the time.

This is the true Superwoman. You don't have to emulate her; you *are* her—you just don't know it. But being a superhero is a tough job. Which is why, to save our health and sanity, we need to strive for balance. That is, devoting our time and energy to the most important areas of our lives in ways that make us feel fulfilled, energized, and whole—and letting the rest go.

And while we can't have it all (yes, it's time to break down and admit it), we can have a

lot. Peace. Energy. Contentment. A rich, rewarding (if often chaotic) life.

Welcome to the Grind

We rise at dawn to get ourselves dressed for work and the kids ready for school. We give them a bag of Cheerios to eat in the car (since we don't have time to cook breakfast), the dirty coffeepot gets left in the sink, and then it's into the car for the commute to work, where deadlines, performance reviews, and unceasing demands await.

Eight (or 10) hours later, we head home to start the second shift: dinner, homework, baths, laundry, bedtime stories. If we're lucky, we'll sit down around 9:00 P.M. for an hour before exhaustion drives us to bed—only to repeat the grind the next day.

This schedule can deplete even the most energetic woman and turn us into seething cauldrons of stress. If we boil over (as we usually do), physical and emotional illness results. Stress can weaken our immune systems and lead to stomach problems, back pain, menstrual irregularities, migraine headaches, high blood pressure, and even heart disease. It's a primary player in depression and anxiety disorders, and it can throw us into an emotional tailspin faster than you can read to the end of this sentence.

Think of it as your body's way of sending up a white flag. At the root of this emotional and physical stress



WOMEN ASK WHY

Why won't my husband just listen to me rather than always try to offer solutions?

Generally speaking, men are more inclined to assume the take-charge role of Mr. Fix-It because they're raised to deal with life's issues head-on without letting their feelings get in the way. By contrast, women are raised to express their emotions first and handle problems second. Of course, there are women who focus on solving problems and men who want to express their emotions.

It sounds as if your husband's way of helping is to offer you solutions. He hears news about a fire and, without thinking, rushes to put it out. It's painful for him to see you upset, so he figures he has to help you.

There's nothing wrong with that. But if you're the type of person who likes to get whatever it is off her chest without advice, talking to your mate will often be frustrating.

Take heart. What you're dealing with is simply a difference in communication styles. You want to be heard. Your husband wants to save the world.

Here's one way to smooth out the situation. In a quiet, relaxed moment, tell your husband, "When I'm upset, it's really helpful for me to express how I'm feeling. I need some time to talk about my feelings. So it would really help me if you would listen and empathize with me—without offering advice."

If you can do this, you'll communicate better, increasing the chance that your needs—and your husband's—will be met. You'll feel satisfied knowing that each of you is being listened to, and he will no longer feel that you're incapable of handling your dilemmas.

Expert consulted

Amy Halberstadt, Ph.D.
Professor of psychology
North Carolina State University
Raleigh



REAL-LIFE SCENARIO

She Can't Say No to Her Boss

Sharon, 41, is the executive assistant to the president of a software manufacturing company. Her boss puts in marathon 16-hour days and expects Sharon to do the same. To get the work done, Sharon skips lunch, stays late, and works weekends. Yet Sharon, who is married and has three children, is afraid to let her boss know she's sinking under her workload. It's no surprise that her marriage is beginning to suffer, her oldest son is having problems in school, and she's having trouble sleeping. What should she do?

Like many women juggling a career and family responsibilities, Sharon is overextended, overrun, and overwhelmed. The number of hours her boss expects her to work—given the fact that she has a family—is not acceptable.

Sharon needs to take a hard look at her life. She should set aside some quiet time for herself and write down what her priorities are, what's important to her, how many hours she'd like to work, and how much time she wants to spend with her family. Sharon should also ask her husband for suggestions on how they can get their family life back on track.

Next, Sharon should develop a plan to put her wish list into action. She needs to talk to her boss about reducing her workload. She should tell her how many hours she's currently working and how many she's willing to work. Sharon should also be prepared to offer her boss suggestions on how to get the extra work done. For example, she might suggest delegating the work to other colleagues.

Sharon should understand that asserting herself in this way is a risk. But it's a risk worth taking. Her boss may respect her for standing up for herself and agree to try one of her suggestions, or she may tell Sharon it's her way or the highway. If the latter wins out, Sharon should begin looking for another job pronto, or resign if she can afford it financially.

For Sharon, the bottom line here is self-preservation.

Expert consulted

Susan M. Seidman, Ph.D.
Associate professor of psychology
Fordham University
New York City

is the fact that we simply take on too many roles. At home, we're domestic goddesses, mothers, and lovers. At work, we're hard-driving professionals.

Do we ever stop to think how difficult juggling all these roles can be? Not likely. We're just too darn busy. But take a closer look at some of our more common roles and the demands each one places on our shoulders.

Mother. We're nurse, disciplinarian, good listener, chauffeur, scheduler, and nurturer, all wrapped into one. "Switching from one role to the next, in split-second intervals, can be overwhelming," says Dr. Cook.

Being on call 24 hours a day, 7 days a week is tough even for psychologists. "I work from 9:00 A.M. to 11:00 P.M., and I'm up at 6:30 in the morning," says Dr. Cook. "It takes its toll." Our marriages, our kids, our health, and even our physical environment (who has time to clean?) suffer as a result.

Career woman. "The average career woman who is also a wife and mother works 78 to 81 hours a week, at work and at home," says Roberta Nutt, Ph.D., professor of psychology and director of the counseling psychology doctorate program at Texas Woman's University in Denton. And the strain shows. In a study of 152 working women with families, those who reported high levels of job strain also scored high for depression, anxiety, and hostility.

"Working women also have to deal with being passed over for promotions, being asked to perform tasks they're overqualified for, and being left out of meetings where decisions are made," says Dr. Dickstein.

Wife. After the kids are in bed, it's time for the third shift: lover. He wants to make love, you want to hit the pillow and start snoring. "You almost have to schedule time for sex," says Dr. Cook. Which doesn't exactly make you feel, well, hot.

"Sex falls by the wayside in a marriage because you're too tired. But couples need to find time to spend with each other. The kids will move away and the jobs will change, but the marital relationship will remain," says Dr. Nutt.

Friend. Our girlfriends keep us sane. We laugh, gossip, listen to problems, and even cry together. But to reap the benefits of our friends' love and concern, we have to give them our time and energy. Which, as we know, is in short supply. The result? Guilt.

Social planner. "Most women are superorganized," says Dr. Dickstein. Which is why we usually get the job of events coordinator—planning vacations and birthday parties, reserving tickets, making doctor's appointments, and hosting family gatherings and holiday parties. It's just one more drain on our energy.

We didn't audition for any of these roles, but they landed in our laps anyway. And no matter how much we have on our plate, the people we love don't seem to realize that there are limits to our time, energy, and strength.

THE SIGNS OF CAREGIVER BURNOUT

According to a survey conducted by the National Family Caregivers Association, 70 percent of its member caregivers are between the ages of 36 and 65, and 82 percent are women. If you're caring for mom, dad, an ill or disabled husband, or a child with special needs, take heed of these warning signs of burnout, and seek professional help.

1. **Depression.** You're constantly unhappy, have trouble sleeping, experience crying spells, or take little or no interest in activities you once enjoyed.

2. **Isolation.** Your caregiving duties are consuming you to the point where you virtually lose touch with the outside world. You stop returning phone calls and visiting friends. You feel as if you have no downtime to relax, unwind, and stay in touch with the outside world.

3. **Anxiety.** You wake with a sick feeling in the pit of your stomach and go to bed with it, too. You constantly worry about making ends meet, administering medications, and monitoring at-home nursing-care equipment.

4. **Irritability and anger.** You blow up over trivial matters and are continually crabby, short-tempered, frustrated, and impatient. You're always on the edge of your temper.

Participating in a support group can help you manage stress and give you an opportunity to talk with others who understand what you're going through. For more information, contact the National Caregiving Foundation, 801 North Pitt Street, Suite 116, Alexandria, VA, 22314, or visit its Web site at www.caregivingfoundation.org. To request a free caregiver's support kit, call (800) 930-1357.

When we don't live up to everyone's expectations, we can feel like failures. "We even feel irresponsible and less of a woman," says Dr. Nutt.

Who Cares? We Do

Every role we play, however, has one thing in common: They all involve taking care of others' needs.



ALL IN THE GENES?

What is maternal instinct?

Biologically speaking, it's a woman's preprogrammed readiness to respond to an infant's hunger or distress. Perhaps that's why many of us believe we're supposed to "just know" what to do as soon as our child is born.

True maternal instinct stops within a child's first year of life. But we tend to confuse that biological readiness to meet a child's basic needs with the developmental process of becoming a mother.

And that process takes time. With time, we *learn* to become good mothers. Our relationships with our children develop as we form connections with them and discover who they are as people. We tune in to their psyche and know intuitively what is in their best interests, even if they don't.

At times, even the most loving mothers can temporarily lose that keen sense of awareness. Our lives are so hectic, or our own issues so pressing, that our antennae fail to pick up the subtle cues that tell us when our kids are hurt, upset, or frightened.

But after all, we're not imbued with special powers when we give birth. Despite our expectations, mothers are, in the end, mere mortals who make mistakes. All we can do is our best.

And make time in our busy schedules for talking, laughing, and pillow fights. "We need to make it a priority to enjoy time with our kids at least a couple times a week." After all, staying close emotionally will keep our mothering skills sharp.

Expert consulted

Diane G. Sanford, Ph.D.
President, Women's Healthcare Partnership
St. Louis
Author of *Postpartum Survival Guide*

Guide for Family Caregivers. "We were raised to care for others."

But this all-care, all-the-time credo can be draining. When we're always on call, there's never time to take care of ourselves, says Dr. Rothman. And if we stifle our feelings, we end up angry. Then we feel guilty about our rage.

We also become less competent as fatigue and frustration get the best of us. For example, if we care for an aging parent, the film of fatigue may result in administering the wrong medication or forgetting a doctor's appointment. If we're on call all the time for the kids, we might come to resemble a raving lunatic more than a loving mom.

Perpetual caregiving can lead to depression, when "nothing is much fun, and you stop seeing friends and doing what you enjoy," says Dr. Rothman. "Difficulty sleeping and fatigue are also signs of depression that you may not be aware of."

A Question of Balance

If you're currently living barely ahead of the eight ball day after day, you may not even be able to imagine how to attain peace, joy, and a sense of purpose in your life.

Experts have one word for you: balance.

"Balance is about preserving your mental and physical health. And

you achieve that by making time for yourself," says Dr. Dickstein.

The first step is to spend time reflecting on your priorities and pinpointing those you've let

slip by the wayside. "Women have to take the time—*make* the time—to examine their lives and figure out what's most important to them," says Dr. Nutt.

Set aside a block of time (tell your family the mom-machine is closed) and make a list of everything you do each day. For each item, ask yourself if it is absolutely necessary to the functioning of your life. For instance, how much television do you watch? What else could you be doing during that time? Is it absolutely necessary that you try to sell Girl Scout cookies at work for your daughter?

You'll inevitably find several things you can cross off your to-do list.

"These are the things that constantly make women feel guilty. We say, 'I'm not doing enough. I shoulda, coulda, woulda,'" says Dr. Dickstein. "But nobody's perfect. I advise women to tell their friends or family members, 'I can't do it at this time. I'll get back to you. Thanks for asking. And please ask again.'"

You also need to ask for help, both at work and at home, and to start building a support system. Can a neighbor drive your son to soccer while you start dinner? Can you turn over floor washing to your husband? Can you ask your secretary to screen your e-mail? Can you ask your gourmet-cook-of-a-mother to double her recipes when you visit so you have leftovers?

And every time you take on a new responsibility or role, evaluate the impact on other areas of your



INNER-SPACE EXPLORERS

Who was Sigmund Freud?

In the 1890s and early 1900s, Austrian neurologist Sigmund Freud laid the foundation for modern psychology with his revolutionary theories. He is perhaps best known for introducing psychoanalysis and popularizing psychotherapy in the Western world.

Freud's male-dominant view of psychology that is centered around sex has often been criticized. He said that our sexual urges, or libido, are our strongest drives from infancy through adulthood. By "sex," Freud meant anything we find pleasurable to our touch. He said that the primary sexual urge of an infant, for example, is to suckle its mother's breast. Freud held that young girls experience "penis envy" when they discover they don't have a penis like their brothers. He believed that this was something women never quite resolved, and as a result, women were psychologically inferior to men. He also theorized that anxiety stems from sexual energy that has been repressed in our unconscious from childhood.

While Freud's ideas were not kind to women, they very much reflected the culture of Victorian Vienna, says Ellyn Kaschak, Ph.D., professor of psychology at San Jose State University in California. He lived in a time when sexuality was taboo. *Leg* was a suggestive word and even piano legs were covered with a skirt for fear they were too suggestive.

In addition to his sex-centered theories, Freud was especially interested in the unconscious mind, which he believed originates in the "id." He said that all of our wishes—including our sexual urges, our basic need for food, and our creative ideas—come from our unconscious. Freud explored this mysterious part of the mind through his patients' free associations and slips of the tongue (Freudian slips).

Freud also relied heavily on interpreting dreams, which he felt held symbolic clues to the wishes that are locked in our unconscious. His dream analysis marked the real beginnings of scientific research into the mind and led to better understanding and treatment of mental health problems.

Freud's ideas are very influential even today.

life. Are you thinking of joining a women's Bible-study group? Maybe it meets only once a month, but that's one night you can't cook dinner or drive the kids to the library. Are you willing to get takeout and put the chauffeuring responsibilities on your husband that night? If not, don't join.

Finally, set aside quiet time to just be. To do what you want to do. To dream many great dreams, and to achieve a few of them. When researchers asked 16 working mothers what the

word *well-being* meant to them, finding solitude and inner peace topped the list.

"Ask yourself, 'When I'm old and gray, what are some of the things that I will wish I had done?'" says Dr. Nutt. "And make sure you do them."

To start, read on. The rest of this book is brimming with ways to plumb the depths of your hidden emotions, set priorities, shed those damaging negative feelings, and find your own definition of well-being.