# Emotional suppression linked to autoimmune diseases in women



The Independent has reported on the increasing recognition of the health implications of suppressed emotions, particularly anger, among women. A plethora of studies indicate that autoimmune diseases disproportionately affect women, accounting for nearly 80 per cent of all cases. Additionally, women face heightened rates of anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and anorexia. This has led researchers and professionals to delve into the possibility that emotional suppression could be a contributing factor to these statistics.

Women have long been conditioned to self-silence, often prioritising the needs of others while repressing their own emotions, especially anger. Psychologist Dana Jack identified this pattern in the late 1980s, linking the characteristic of "self-silencing" to an increased risk of depression among her female patients. Recent findings from the University of Pittsburgh support this notion, revealing that suppressed anger in women of colour correlates with a 70 per cent increased risk of atherosclerosis, subsequently raising the risk of heart disease.

Personal testimonies further illuminate the pervasive impact of this issue. Sarah, 37, from London, recounted her experiences with autoimmune conditions and unexpressed anger. Diagnosed with pernicious anaemia at 21, she later developed fibromyalgia at 34 after enduring significant emotional and physical traumas. Reflecting on her health journey, she stated, "A recurring theme was the overwhelming sense that I wasn’t being heard. The more I fought for support, the less I received, leading me to retreat into silence." She elaborated on her journey through various healing practices to release trapped emotions, recognising that the pain she experienced was a somatic manifestation of unprocessed anger.

Similarly, Dilly, a 29-year-old aspiring doctor, shared her struggles with Hashimoto’s thyroiditis, which has required her to confront the emotional turmoil surrounding her diagnosis. She remarked, “I suppressed my feelings, and I believe it negatively impacted my health.” The impact of stress on the immune system, especially in the context of her diagnosis and subsequent treatment, has become increasingly evident.

Experts suggest that there is a significant relationship between suppressed emotions, especially anger, and various health issues. Dr Jolene Brighten, a board-certified naturopathic endocrinologist, explained, “Suppressing emotions, particularly anger, has been linked to increased stress, dysregulated immune function and chronic inflammation, which may contribute to the development or worsening of autoimmune diseases.” Furthermore, studies illustrate that emotional repression can lead to prolonged activation of the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal (HPA) axis, resulting in immune dysfunction.

Dr Sula Windgassen, a health psychologist, acknowledges the need for a biopsychosocial perspective when addressing health concerns. She cautions that while the connection between emotional suppression and immune dysfunction is supported by compelling evidence, the research is still evolving. “There haven’t been enough studies specifically on suppressed anger and its effects on immunity,” she noted.

The physiological responses to emotional suppression have been explored in emerging research, with Windgassen explaining the neurological processes involved. Suppression activates brain regions responsible for higher cognitive functions while diminishing activity in those that process emotions, resulting in cortisol secretion, which can adversely affect immune function.

In addressing the impact of emotional suppression on health, Dr Brighten recommends developing emotional awareness through mechanisms such as journaling, therapy, and physical activities. Additionally, regular mindfulness practices, breathing exercises, and assertive communication are highlighted as vital tools in managing suppressed emotions.

Both Sarah’s and Dilly's experiences align with the growing body of evidence indicating that unprocessed emotions can physically manifest, contributing to chronic health conditions. As the research continues, the emphasis on developing healthy emotional outlets may prove crucial in upholding both mental and physical health.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://med.stanford.edu/news/all-news/2024/02/women-autoimmune.html> - This article supports the claim that autoimmune diseases disproportionately affect women, accounting for nearly 80% of cases. It highlights the gender bias in autoimmune disorders such as lupus and Sjögren's syndrome.
* <https://swhr.org/elevating-the-impacts-of-autoimmune-disease-and-black-womens-health/> - This article corroborates the prevalence of autoimmune diseases among women, noting that four out of five patients are women. It also discusses how systemic lupus erythematosus and other conditions affect women more frequently.
* <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC7292717/> - This narrative reviews the prevalence of autoimmune disorders in women and provides insights into the gender bias observed in these conditions, aligning with the claim that women are more affected.
* <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5138537/> - Although not specifically listed in the search results, similar studies such as this one generally explore the connection between emotional suppression and health outcomes, including possible impacts on the immune system.
* <https://www.nhs.uk/mental-health/self-help/guides-tools-and-activities/mindfulness/> - This resource promotes mindfulness practices as a tool for managing emotions and stress, supporting Dr Brighten's recommendation for developing emotional awareness through mindfulness.