Information about women and ADHD

WOMEN AND ADHD

A LOOK AT A UNIQUE WORLD

DEAR READER.

This guide has been written specifically for you.

You may not have seen a guide before that is aimed specifically at women with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD).

ADHD is found in both children and adults. It is as common among women as among men. Women may experience ADHD very differently, however.

ADHD FROM A FEMALE PERSPECTIVE

Women often experience ADHD very differently from men. The hyperactivity typically associated with boys and men with ADHD may not be as big a problem for women. Poor concentration and difficulty attending to detail are much more common.

Because these symptoms are less obvious, it may take longer to identify and diagnose ADHD in girls and young women.

This guide discusses ADHD from a female perspective, from small girls to women with their own families. Some stories may sound familiar and help you understand how you became you.

REMEMBER THAT ADHD HAS MANY PROS AS WELL. IT IS IMPORTANT TO LEAD THE BEST LIFE YOU CAN!

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WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO HAVE AN ADHD GUIDE AIMED SPECIFICALLY AT WOMEN?

In modern society, men and women often lead very different lives, especially after having children.

Although a majority of women have a busy working life, they often take a lion's share of responsibility for daily family life. That means they also have to find time for many challenging tasks such as housework, parent-teacher meetings and social life. The pressure can build up, and women with ADHD symptoms can find expectations overwhelming.

Daily issues such as mix-ups and missing appointments can cause frustration and guilt, and may eventually affect your self-esteem. No matter how hard you try, it may be very difficult for someone with ADHD symptoms to remain on top of what needs to be done at work, at home and for the family.

Only one in five people diagnosed with ADHD in childhood are girls. The split is more even in adulthood, but many women are only diagnosed with ADHD when their child is diagnosed, and the mother is assessed as well.

One reason women are diagnosed later in life is that girls may not exhibit the typical hyperactivity and impulsive behaviour seen in boys. There is a lack of clinical studies on girls with ADHD symptoms, making girls with ADHD a blind spot for healthcare professionals. Symptoms such as poor concentration and organisational skills are overlooked or not recognised as ADHD. Girls seem to be able to manage or control their ADHD symptoms at an early age, especially if such behaviour is considered disruptive or inappropriate for girls. Rules are sometimes stricter for girls than for boys, and girls learn early on not to show their real feelings, and to live up to the expectations of a school or society.

It is clear that too few girls and women are aware that they may have ADHD. It is therefore important to recognise the particular issues women with ADHD symptoms face in their everyday lives.

AN EXAMPLE STORY

"After talking with her 8-year-old son's paediatrician, Anne was advised to have an ADHD assessment herself. Her family background gave a clear indication that Anne's father might also suffer from undiagnosed ADHD. According to Anne, her father was very impulsive and hot-tempered, and often drank too much."

HOW DOES AN ADHD BRAIN DIFFER FROM A NON-ADHD BRAIN?

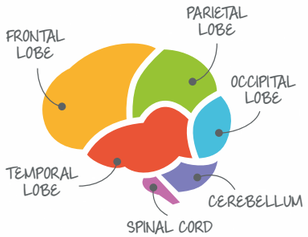
ADHD has appeared in medical journals since the beginning of the 20th century. Articles mention children with inattentiveness, impulsiveness and hyperactivity. Several names have been used, but the current name emphasises a lack of attention.

ADHD is a developmental neuropsychiatric disorder, which affects approximately 5-7% of school-aged children. External ADHD symptoms appear in childhood, but more than 75% of children with ADHD also have significant symptoms in adulthood.

ADHD affects both the structure and function of the brain. Changes seen in the brain, and especially in the frontal lobe, can affect impulse control, concentration and inhibition.

The brain has billions of neurones or nerve cells that are organised into units that perform specific tasks. These units exchange information through nerve pathways. In ADHD, these nerve pathways do not connect in the same way as in a person who does not have ADHD. This makes certain tasks such as concentrating and organising particularly challenging.

ADHD also affects brain chemistry. People with ADHD may have problems with the processing of dopamine. This chemical is connected with moving, sleeping, attention and learning.



The precise cause of ADHD remains unknown, but scientists have discovered that there is a strong genetic link. Other family members are therefore also likely to have ADHD.

ADHD can significantly impair the quality of your daily life and prevent you from reaching your full potential. If the disorder is identified and treated successfully, your life can change dramatically.

STORIES OF WOMEN WITH ADHD SYMPTOMS

WHILE THE ROOTS OF ADHD LIE IN CHILDHOOD, IT IS OFTEN IDENTIFIED IN ADULTHOOD.

Many women see an ADHD diagnosis as the turning point of their lives. Suddenly, many past events become comprehensible and make sense. Someone may have been experiencing certain types of problems for a long time, but they now realise that they are not defective or more stupid than others.

You may recognise the following description of a typical young girl with ADHD:

"She is such a sweet dreamer, but she is also disorganised and has trouble concentrating at school. She has mood swings, and it is not easy for her to make good friends."

For some women, an ADHD diagnosis explains why it was hard for them to keep up with homework, and why it is hard now to stick to deadlines at work. They understand that unsatisfactory grades at school were not due to a lack of effort or skill, especially in their favourite subjects.

They realise that they were not rude, difficult or wild children after all. They just could not control their behaviour. Some girls are so ashamed of their careless or rash behaviour they withdraw into their shell. This is one of the key symptoms of ADHD.

Even as women, they still believe they are somehow different than others.

FROM CHILDHOOD TO ADULTHOOD

ADHD SYMPTOMS CHANGE OVER AGE

The possibility of ADHD is assessed in adulthood only if you had childhood symptoms or indications of ADHD-like behaviour. Memories of your years at comprehensive school play an important role in all discussions with healthcare professionals.

Characteristics of ADHD may change over the years. Children and adults lead a very different life, and it is unsurprising that adults experience problems with concentration and attention, restlessness and impatience differently. If they experience hyperactivity, it is often less obvious, and the physical restlessness of the teenage years can turn into inner motivation and stress.

Women often suffer from new symptoms such as eating disorders, mood swings and anxiety. This could lead to problems in relationships.

Adults develop various strategies to keep their ADHD traits in check and control their nervous behaviour. Sometimes people try to ease their inner restlessness with an extreme sports regimen. Women especially are true masters of self-control and social norms. They often use their social circle to help them improve their people skills.

Many women say, however, that they experience a lot of stress, and it is hard for them to relax when your mind races.

While children often move restlessly, adults also suffer from hyperactivity, but it may be less pronounced. It becomes easier to control your impulsiveness, at least in formal settings.

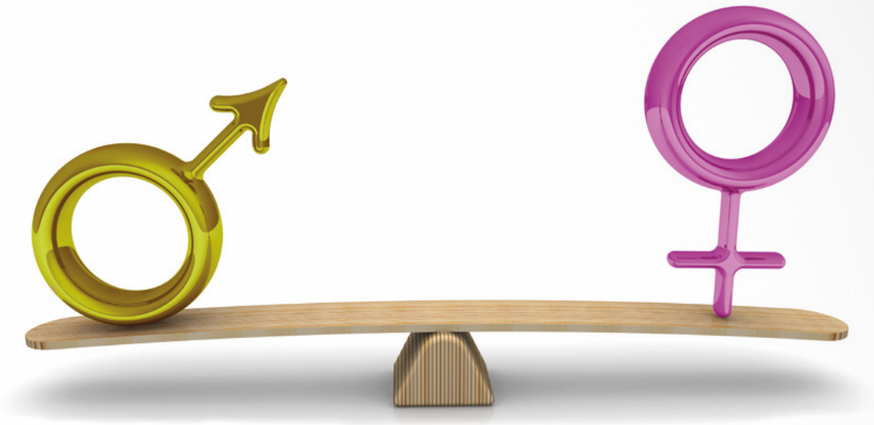
CHANGING SYMPTOMS

At school, children interrupt and even disrupt the class, but adults may be able to remain silent in meetings when it is inappropriate to speak.

Children →	Adults
Hyperactivity/impulsiveness	
• Squirming and fidgeting • Unable to sit still • Unable to wait their turn • Running and climbing a lot • Unable to play/work peacefully • Always on the move • Speaks constantly • Shouts answers out loud • Disturbs/interrupts others	• Works inefficiently • Becomes restless in long meetings • Unable to queue • Drives too fast • Always wants to be active • Cannot tolerate frustration • Speaks constantly • Interrupts others • Makes inappropriate remarks
Attentiveness	
• Finds it difficult to stay attentive • May be absent-minded • Does not listen • Is unable to complete tasks • Unable to plan • Loses important objects	• Lack of motivation • Finds it difficult to stay attentive (in meetings, at the office, when reading) • Procrastination creates problems • Slow and inefficient • Poor time management • Disorganised

IS ADHD SIMILAR FOR MEN AND WOMEN?

YES AND NO!



DIFFERENCES

No one fits a stereotype of ADHD, but the key characteristics such as inattentiveness, hyperactivity and impulsiveness are often found in both sexes to some extent, regardless of age.

It is important to identify the ADHD traits typical for women to receive the full support of healthcare professionals.

Typically, women seek help from healthcare professionals later in life than men. We know that girls cope with their childhood symptoms differently than boys and adapt their behaviour to fit the crowd. When women do see a doctor, the real cause of their problems often remains undiagnosed. For example, women may suffer from anxiety, but ADHD is not diagnosed as the cause.

Women are more likely to see a doctor because of burnout or depression. However, they may be unaware that these symptoms could be caused by ADHD. An experienced professional can determine if burnout or depression is associated with continuous conflicts in social relationships or work, or that controlling personal or inner chaos takes extra effort and energy. Mood swings seem more common among women. The mood swings associated with ADHD are often a reaction to intense external stimuli which may affect your peace of mind. Such emotional reactions are typically short-lived.

Women with ADHD symptoms can quickly become distracted by other feelings or thoughts. They experience things considered normal by others more intensely, leading to high stress levels. Even everyday situations can make women with ADHD symptoms feel they cannot cope. Others may find this difficult to understand. You could be overwhelmed if you experience too much at once, making it impossible to prioritise your thoughts and actions.

Suddenly even small tasks such as buying school books or clipping your nails become a big challenge. Being overwhelmed may lead to emotionally charged behaviour, which can sometimes be misdiagnosed as a personality disorder, because challenging and unnerving interaction with others is a common symptom.

Women tend to feel they get less support than men in their daily life and career. Perhaps this encourages women to develop coping strategies. At first, it may seem their daily routines are well-structured, and everything is under control. Inner chaos is not always evident to others. This may not be a conscious choice, but it can be a very efficient strategy.

For example, you may develop habits you strictly follow, such as always putting daily objects (mobile phone, keys, glasses, hand bag) in exactly the same place and creating a precise daily schedule to make sure you do not forget anything. You may need to keep rechecking everything, as in obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD).

Such strategies may work well at first, but over the long term, they become mentally and physically strenuous, and can lead to burnout. Just one little mishap and everything comes tumbling down, often ending in tears or a tantrum. It may seem impossible to carry on after failing, but these women still often decide to do so.

COPING STRATEGIES ARE NOT ENOUGH WHEN EVERYTHING IS UPSIDE DOWN

INCREASING DEMANDS, EXCESSIVE STRESS AND BURNOUT SYMPTOMS

Because ADHD symptoms are hereditary, they are often lifelong. Moreover, ADHD does not appear out of the blue. Even if you are diagnosed as an adult, indications of similar behaviour already occurred in childhood. They just went unnoticed.

How symptoms occur, and whether they impair you to a lesser or greater extent, may vary depending on the support you receive, and the stress you experienced as a child.

If you get a lot of support or are very adaptable, ADHD can go unnoticed for a long time. For example, if a gifted child is very keen to learn and is encouraged by their parents, possible problems can remain hidden in the first years of school.

Practical support, like checking homework, packing the backpack and sending the child to school on time, may help prevent problems. When girls with ADHD symptoms reach puberty, they are expected to cope more on their own, and challenges to organising may increase.

As the years go by, they move out, pursue a career and perhaps become parents themselves. The old coping strategies may no longer be enough. Extreme physical regimens or strict schedules that used to be helpful become less effective.

ADHD symptoms tend to become more pronounced

- **Impatience**
- **Grumpiness**
- **Procrastination**
- **Increased tendency to forget**
- **Making careless mistakes more often**

Severe burnout and stress-related depression symptoms can appear for the first time in their life.

6

ASPECTS OF LIFE

THAT MAY PROVE CHALLENGING

EMMA, AGED 6

1 Education and training

PRIMARY SCHOOL

Most teachers have a stereotypical image of ADHD.

"The class clown or a restless, nervous and hyperactive boy."

"The problem could be ADHD."

If a teacher notices that a child has difficulty concentrating or is prone to daydreaming, they may not connect it with ADHD. The pupil does not interrupt in class, fish for attention and is not "wild" like the girls with symptoms of hyperactivity. Because their symptoms are often not associated with ADHD, such girls rarely receive a diagnosis and support.

If teachers were aware of common ADHD symptoms in girls, they would recognise them from this typical description:

"Emma is a quiet pupil, who is often distracted. She daydreams a lot and is lost in her own thoughts. She often forgets her books and school supplies, and does not listen to homework assignments."

If the family helps a lot, it may be difficult for the teacher to recognise the signs of ADHD. The family thinks they are helping by packing the school bag and helping with homework, but they may be masking the symptoms of ADHD.

SOFIA, AGED 11

LOWER SECONDARY SCHOOL

Starting lower secondary school may be challenging for young girls, and especially those with ADHD symptoms. They understand how important it is to make friends, but it is difficult to maintain a friendship if it seems you are not interested in listening to your friend or do not show up when you promised. Your friends may not understand the reason, and the friendship may soon be over.

Maintaining strong friendships is extremely important at this age, but it may not be easy for girls with ADHD symptoms. And puberty changes everything yet again.

Even at best, ADHD can be an emotional rollercoaster, and puberty just emphasises this feeling. You may often argue with your parents or become more socially isolated. Confrontations, often with mothers, rapidly escalate and are often triggered by small things like not doing your homework.

AN EXAMPLE STORY

"Her grades are gradually dropping until she has to retake exams or repeat a grade.

She stays out late and spends time with friends after school. Recently, she exploded after reading some negative comments about herself on social media. She tries to cheer herself up by impulse buying with friends and wastes her money on things she doesn't need.

She doesn't follow her parents' rules, especially the curfew. If you bring it up, she gets mad first and then becomes very emotional. She runs to her room and keeps to herself."

HOW TO IMPROVE THE SITUATION

The parents of hyperactive girls often understand, either instinctively or by chance, that physical exercise has a positive influence on their daughter. It helps to burn off excess energy, making her calmer and more focused. Intense and often competitive exercise can compensate for the impact of ADHD.

However, it can prevent an early diagnosis. ADHD symptoms can become evident and start causing problems only if the child is injured and has to take a break from her exercise regimen.

Medication and lower secondary school

If ADHD has been diagnosed in childhood and managed with medication, a teenager may suddenly decide they no longer want to continue with the treatment.

They may even deny they have ADHD. Young people do not want to be labelled sick and may not want to take medication if they feel it changes their personality.

If a teenager starts drinking as they get older, it may be difficult to persuade them to take their medicine. Stopping the treatment impairs concentration and attentiveness, which may in turn affect their school performance. It can be a very stressful time, both for the parents and the teenagers!

FURTHER STUDIES

This stage of life brings new challenges, because it's time to make important decisions, and that may not be easy for young women with ADHD.

"Should I go to general upper secondary school or look for an apprenticeship?"

"Could I get into university?"

"If I apply for a traineeship, should I wait until I get the results of the matriculation examination?"

"What are my strengths and weaknesses?"

A lack of motivation and a tendency to procrastinate may mean that when they finally do apply to a school or for a job, it's often too late. The teenager may be disappointed or have to settle for a school or a job that was not their first choice.

It may be difficult to fill in applications. They might make mistakes or omit important information. Several rejections can make you frustrated and disappointed, possibly leading to depression.

AN EXAMPLE STORY

"Anna's matriculation examination is coming up, but she has no idea what she wants to do after that. Her parents are hoping that she will find an apprenticeship, but Anna can't decide what profession she is interested in.

When she tries to find information online, she ends up shopping, or playing games or watching YouTube videos.
All the applications she succeeds in sending are rejected. She either sent the application too late or information was missing.

She is absent-minded. She tried to participate in a vocational training workshop at school aiming to help students find a suitable profession, but she lost interest.

1 Education and training

UNIVERSITY

At university, learning is more independent, and this can emphasise problems related to attentiveness, poor organisational skills and a lack of motivation. However, these problems may be overcome, because studies now focus on a certain field in which the student is interested and performs well.

Creating a new social network can be problematic at first, but the same goes for many other students as well. You no longer have clear schedules and support structures to guide you, but you can practise and learn good self-management skills. All students must regularly attend classes and lectures, but it may take some effort to stop procrastinating and avoid last-minute study sessions at night or missing essay deadlines.

If you move to another area or town, you may need to switch to a new doctor. This may feel difficult, because you are going through a transition in life from being a young person with ADHD symptoms to an adult with ADHD symptoms.

To pursue your dreams, you may need to tackle various problems and barriers during your studies. Remember that you can always change your goals if they are unattainable. You may also need to make compromises on your profession and income.

Instead of seeking professional help, women tend to blame themselves if their plans fail. They feel they should be able to manage everything alone. After all, their mother, best friend and neighbours seem to be able to.

2 Career and professional life

Work can be more important for women with ADHD.

Employment can bring the following benefits:

- **Daily schedule**
- **Sense of success**
- **Positive interaction**
- **Improved social skills**
- **Sense of being needed**
- **Financial independence**

Problems that are known ADHD traits and relate to long-term concentration, forgetfulness, absent-mindedness and poor time management may not disappear, but you can find new ways to cope in a positive work environment.

It is important to be able to sense when it is inappropriate to talk and to avoid heated discussions with colleagues, superiors and customers.

Work can cause additional stress, making coping difficult at times. Watch out for the warning signs of burnout: mental exhaustion, increased anxiety and melancholy.

2 Career and professional life

In working life, two important moments can cause problems.

A: Starting off on the wrong foot

AN EXAMPLE STORY

"After finishing her final exams, Liisa got a dream apprenticeship as a designer at a marketing company. She was pleased to have an opportunity to showcase her creativity and use her imagination.

Unfortunately, she was often in trouble, because she always came in late. Liisa stayed up at night browsing the depths of the Internet and had trouble waking up in the morning despite her three alarms.

Once she was ill and forgot to call her supervisor. Instead, she sent a WhatsApp message to her colleague. She was given a warning and told not to do that again.

She tried to prove her skills by taking on more small tasks and projects, but was rarely able to finish them.
She was upset when she was not praised for the quality of her 95% input but criticised for the missing 5%. She felt stupid and worthless, and suddenly decided to quit the apprenticeship training.

B: Changes at work that are beyond your control

AN EXAMPLE STORY

"Maria works at a big car dealership, processing warranty applications. She worked part-time for several years but decided to start working full-time after the children moved out.

When working part-time, she had the office all to herself. Now she had to share the office with two colleagues. She often made mistakes, because it was difficult for her to filter out the background noise. Sensory overload made her anxious and aggressive, and her boss had to give her several warnings.

She was issued a written warning, because one mistake caused a considerable loss for the car dealership, and many customers complained about her. Maria became depressed.

She tried antidepressants and psychotherapy but did not receive an ADHD diagnosis until the rehabilitation step.

Maria discussed the matter with her psychiatrist and supervisor, and now she has her own room. She is much happier, and her work performance has improved."

Tom's story:

MY RELATIONSHIP WITH TINA IS GREAT BUT FAR FROM EASY

"Tina is a very lively, spontaneous, attractive and exciting woman. She is curious and has a strong sex drive. She can be very social, funny and often impulsive. One thing is sure: it's never boring!

Living with Tina is also very stressful, because she never stops. She has a lot to do at weekends as well or she has planned something for the whole family. It's like she's afraid of missing out. That is why we get up early even on Sundays. We hardly have enough time to rest and relax.

Lately, we've argued a lot, because Tina is very moody and unpredictable. Her mood can change in a split second. She starts to pout, and I have no idea why.

Something that was fine yesterday may irritate her today, and she becomes short-tempered and patronising. Then she withdraws into herself. She hardly speaks and just wants to be left alone. It's hard for me to know what I should do and how to fix the situation.

Tina usually calms down quickly, apologises and is affectionate, but the pleasant moment has already passed. Our marriage is a rollercoaster..."

When your partner has ADHD (and especially if you both have ADHD), the relationship is often very close but turbulent, causing stress in the long run. If one partner does not have ADHD, they must be aware of ADHD's possible effect on daily life to be able to support and understand the other. Counselling may help to cope with recurring tension and problem behaviour.

COUNSELLING SERVICES

Couples counselling may help to understand how your partner feels and to find ways to support your partner. If you cannot find a suitable service online, ask your doctor for more information.

4 Family: home life and ADHD

Tina's story:

TODAY WAS PURE CHAOS! AGAIN!

"I only finished half the tasks I had planned but was already exhausted when our daughter Julia came home from school. I just can't seem to be able to control the chaos at home. My mind wanders, and I can't help it.

When I was making lunch, Julia just babbled on. I couldn't follow the news on the radio, and I overcooked the spaghetti when I tried to empty the dishwasher in between. Julia's friend called about some homework that Julia had forgotten to write down (again!).
All this kept running through my head, and I could feel irritation and anger build up when Julia started to do her homework. Suddenly I just snapped. I started screaming at Julia, because she started a sentence with a small letter. How many times does she need to be told? Is she doing it on purpose to annoy me? I wanted to take her swimming, and it was her fault we ran out of time.

Being tired is no excuse. I overreacted and it was wrong to shout at Julia. I ended up practically doing her homework myself just to get it done. I was furious and felt bad for handling the situation badly.

Julia was in a good mood when she came home from school, but I ruined everything. I'm afraid my anger will destroy our relationship. Tom says I'm too short-tempered. I can't seem to do anything right! As a child, I often felt that I was treated unfairly. Mum and grandma were very fussy and loud, and our homelife was hectic. I'm afraid I'll repeat the same mistakes."

In spite of their best intentions, women with ADHD often try to achieve unrealistic amounts in their daily lives. They may not be able to meet their expectations, because they take on too much, and have difficulty prioritising work and organising it into smaller units. They start too many things at once and suddenly feel overwhelmed.

When the stress level increases, they become more frustrated, have emotional outbursts, start to blame themselves and feel guilty. They may recognise these problems and understand them at counselling, but are usually unable to change their behaviour patterns without appropriate support.

5 Friends and friendship

Women with ADHD symptoms often have a wide social network, and they are popular. In addition to friends, they know neighbours, colleagues, people from their hobbies and parents of their children.

They are happy to help, say yes too easily, take on too much or do favours for others. They try to achieve too much in too little time and rush from one appointment to the next. Others might interpret their constant stress as restlessness. They often double-book themselves and find it very embarrassing to have to cancel agreed meetings.

Procrastination adds to their stress.

It is important to them to seem normal and hide their ADHD symptoms. For example, they may prefer to bake a cake late at night than admit they forgot to bake a cake for the school party.

Women with ADHD symptoms are often seen as social and fun. Others see them as confident, straightforward and socially adaptable. They often talk a lot and reveal more personal information than they intended. It may make them annoyed or even embarrassed to think about it, and they decide to be less open. But good intentions are soon forgotten when they are again at the centre of attention. They tend to participate in discussions that can become heated arguments.

On the other hand, they have trouble following discussions because of their concentration difficulties. Women may feel socially inadequate or awkward, and prefer to stay in the background. They feel misunderstood but cannot explain how they feel, because they find their behaviour unusual and unreasonable. It may be difficult to concentrate in a large group and a busy environment like a café, and sensory stimuli may make them appear absent-minded or even indifferent towards the other members of the group.

6 Female health

ADHD AND HORMONES

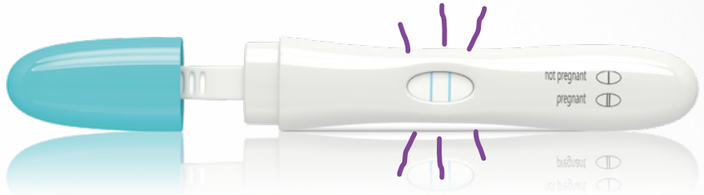
People with ADHD live on an emotional rollercoaster. Natural hormonal changes during periods, pregnancy and menopause make matters worse.

Oestrogen is one of the main hormones that regulate the female reproductive system. It also has a significant effect on your concentration level, mood and memory. Oestrogen or oestradiol levels fluctuate significantly during the 28-day menstrual cycle, as well as the perimenopause and menopause. Women with ADHD tend to be particularly sensitive to low oestrogen levels.

Possible effects of low oestrogen levels:

- **Problems with concentration**
- **Mood swings**
- **Depression**
- **Anxiety**
- **Headaches**
- **Fatigue (exhaustion).**

The hormone balance in women with ADHD symptoms has a major impact on attention and restlessness, as well as activity, sexuality and hyperactivity.



SEXUALITY AND PREGNANCY

It is well known that both boys and girls with ADHD symptoms become sexually active at a younger age. High impulsiveness, and curiosity related to puberty and physical changes are more intense among these young people.

Parents should discuss the matter openly and well in advance, long before they think their child becomes sexually active. It is important to openly share information and discuss sexuality and contraception. We recommend that young people also discuss these matters with a doctor or make an appointment at a sexual health clinic. Unwanted pregnancies are more common among young girls and women with ADHD symptoms.

DURING PREGNANCY

During pregnancy, the symptoms of ADHD can improve significantly. Some women have next to no symptoms. However, the familiar symptoms return soon after childbirth, especially forgetfulness and problems with organising.

Some women may be very stressed during pregnancy. It could be overwhelming to think about childbirth and getting ready for it. Parenthood always changes your life, but it may mean more chaos and confusion if you have ADHD symptoms.

ADHD medication is typically not recommended during pregnancy. In exceptional cases, the doctor may decide that discontinuation of treatment is more harmful. You should always follow your doctor's advice.

PREMENSTRUAL SYNDROME (PMS)

Generally speaking, women with ADHD symptoms suffer from more severe PMS symptoms. They are likely to have pain and other physical symptoms such as discomfort and restlessness just before their period.

During these few days, women may seem very moody, and this is partly true, because they can be can be irritable, particularly sensitive and melancholy, and have trouble sleeping. If the PMS symptoms are very difficult, a doctor may decide to prescribe a low dose of antidepressant.

If you are already on ADHD medication, a doctor may increase the dose for a short time before and after the period. Do not increase the dose unless your doctor tells you to.

MENOPAUSE

Menopause lasts for approximately four years after your last period, but up to 12 years in approximately one out of ten women. There are few studies on how women with ADHD symptoms experience menopause, but we do know that ADHD symptoms usually increase during this time.

Your behaviour can become more impulsive, and mood swings more pronounced. Menopause affects your ability to pay attention to detail and your work performance. The ability to concentrate may vary significantly.

After menopause, oestrogen levels drop by approximately 65%. This causes concentration and memory difficulties, even in women who do not have ADHD. If ADHD already caused these problems before, the symptoms may become worse, and new symptoms can occur. Combined with the well-known symptoms of menopause (e.g. hot flushes and insomnia), this could be a very challenging time.

Menopause can be a very emotional time for all women, when they have to accept the fact that they can no longer have children and they are turning a new leaf in their life. Women may worry that their partner no longer finds them attractive. It is important to openly discuss your feelings.

TREATMENT OPTIONS

TREATMENT REQUIRES A DIAGNOSIS

ADHD can be diagnosed by a psychiatrist, neurologist or another doctor who specialises in the diagnosis and treatment of ADHD. The expert then recommends a personalised treatment plan. The need for treatment is not due to the diagnosis itself but the symptoms possibly caused by ADHD. The doctor will explain what type of difficulties you may have in your daily life, and what areas of life can be problematic.

If the parents request treatment, or the child's school puts pressure on the parents to seek treatment, it is important to understand what behaviour has prompted this request before recommending any treatment.

Other psychological problems may be identified as well, especially when ADHD is diagnosed in adulthood. Further investigation is necessary if signs of depression or anxiety disorder occur. Substance abuse, compulsive buying and eating disorders are common among adults diagnosed with ADHD.

The next step is to agree on the treatment's goals. These should be limited to three or five at the most. It is important to understand what is expected from the treatment, and explain to the doctor how you expect your own feelings or behaviour to change. The doctor will also consider other conditions for which you take medication and give more information about the recommended treatment.

All treatments aim to help you achieve your full potential and be able to manage your daily life.

MEDICATION AND OTHER TREATMENT

Treatment plans for ADHD must be personalised according to your needs. A large selection of different treatment options is available, but psychoeducation, i.e. counselling for patients and family, is an important first step. It provides information and support to both the person with ADHD symptoms and their loved ones.

The three measures or treatments listed in bold on the right are key to comprehensive therapy for adults with ADHD symptoms. Information and counselling create a foundation for each approach. Ideally, family members will participate in the discussions. Medication is often needed to achieve the optimal benefit from other treatment measures.

Possibly recommended forms of treatment:

- **Psychoeducation (information and counselling)**
- **Family involvement**
- **Medication**
- Participating in a self-help group
- Behaviour therapy
- Endurance sports
- Learning skills
- Occupational therapy
- Referral to a gynaecologist (changes in symptoms related to the menstrual cycle, hormonal therapy)
- Learning social and emotional skills
- Coaching
- Debt counselling
- Educational counselling
- Couples counselling/therapy
- Relaxing exercise (yoga, tai chi)
- Mindfulness-based cognitive therapy
- Psychotherapy/systemic therapy

Medication often reduces inner restlessness and helps to improve the ability to concentrate. It may also improve other factors such as attention and memory, and the tendency to procrastinate.

People with ADHD sometimes feel they are outsiders. Self-help groups are worth considering, because they can be beneficial in many ways. Evidence suggests that endurance sports may help alleviate ADHD symptoms and have a positive effect on life.

Behaviour therapy may help solve problems related to negative thoughts, work or relationships, especially if ADHD is diagnosed as an adult.

PROBLEM: ANXIETY OR DEPRESSION

Many women seek medical help for anxiety or depression. They may be surprised to hear that their symptoms are caused by undiagnosed ADHD. At this point, the assessment focuses on how to achieve an accurate diagnosis.

People with ADHD symptoms have a higher risk of mental disorders. As many as 80% of adults with ADHD have at least one other diagnosed psychological disorder such as a mood disorder, anxiety disorder, substance abuse or personality disorder. The doctor must find out if these disorders are caused by ADHD or other factors.

Depression will not automatically go away after successful ADHD treatment. Depression must be treated or at least prevented to ensure successful ADHD treatment.

BRINGING ORDER TO CHAOS

Procrastination is a common symptom of ADHD, just like forgetfulness, unreliability and an inability to plan. This tends to make life chaotic and causes a significant amount of stress.

As the family grows, chaos increases disproportionately, especially when there are several children, and some of them may also have ADHD. Experts speak of executive dysfunction. The following example shows how this looks in real life.

AN EXAMPLE STORY

"A couple in their twenties came for advice. The husband had a full-time job. The wife had ADHD, and she stayed at home to take care of their two small children (aged 4 and 7).

The husband couldn't understand why their home looked like a bombsite when he came home from work. Sometimes the breakfast dishes were still on the table, and the husband worried because their older child hadn't done their homework by 6 p.m.

With tears in her eyes, the wife explained that she felt like a complete failure and couldn't understand why everything always ended in chaos.

In the morning, after her husband left for work, she took their daughter to kindergarten and their son to school. Most mornings, one of the children was late, and the other was missing their bag or something else, and the wife simply didn't have time to get everything organised.

She explained that she then drove straight home, and her first task was to clear the dishes from the table. When she was putting the food in the fridge, she realised that she needed to go grocery shopping. She then had to write a list to make sure she didn't forget anything. When she went to look for a pen and paper, she remembered that she should first turn on the dishwasher. That way, the wash cycle would finish while she was taking care of other housework.

And this went on all day long. She didn't have time to sit down for five minutes. She was often exhausted and kept starting new tasks, never finishing any of them."

In a situation like this, it may be very useful to have an ADHD coach or ask an occupational therapist who specialises in ADHD for a home visit.

Various support options could be of help. Your doctor can tell you what kind of help is available where you live and refer you for appropriate support. Together, you can prepare detailed strategies for structuring certain processes and plan your daily life and housework. Breaking down complicated tasks into smaller units helps prioritise and set deadlines. It is important to schedule breaks as well to avoid exhausting yourself.

MAKING USE OF YOUR STRENGTHS

ADHD ALSO HAS ITS BENEFITS!

The term 'attention deficit' seems to indicate that people with ADHD are unable to concentrate, but that is not true. If they are interested, people with ADHD symptoms can concentrate more intensely and for longer periods than other people. This skill is called hyperfocus.

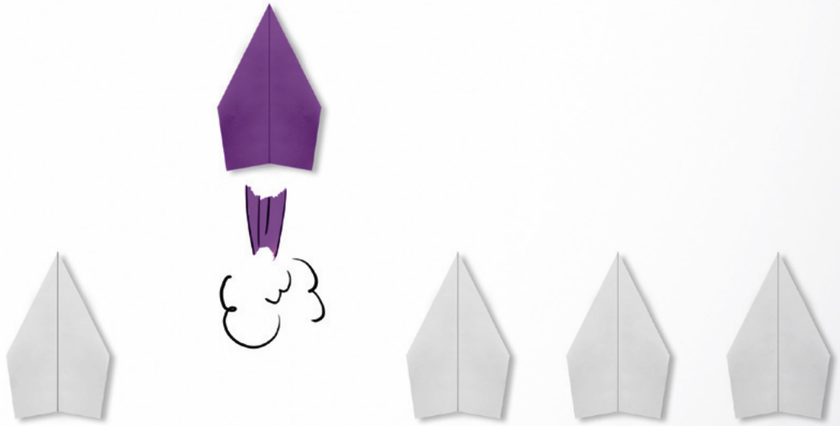
ADHD can have several benefits for women. Here are some examples, but you can probably come up with more.

Typical strengths of women with ADHD symptoms:

- **You are flexible**
- **You can switch strategies on the go**
- **You do not give up if you are convinced of something**
- **You are goal-oriented**
- **You can think visually and have a unique way of thinking**
- **You are independent**
- **You are expressive**
- **You are innovative**
- **You come up with a solution when others are stuck.**

Make a list of your special strengths and show it to your doctor. It may be useful for the doctor to know what characteristics you consider positive. It may also help to guide the support elements that are part of your treatment plan.

Medication can be discontinued or adjusted if one of your positive characteristics fades or is lost. It is therefore important for your doctor to know what you consider your individual strengths.



MORE HELP

Information about ADHD:

www.adhd-liitto.fi

www.bvif.fi/fi/tukeaperheille/adhdkeskus

www.adhdtutuksi.fi

LINKS FOR INFORMATION ABOUT ADHD*

* The links were checked in April 2025

NOTES:

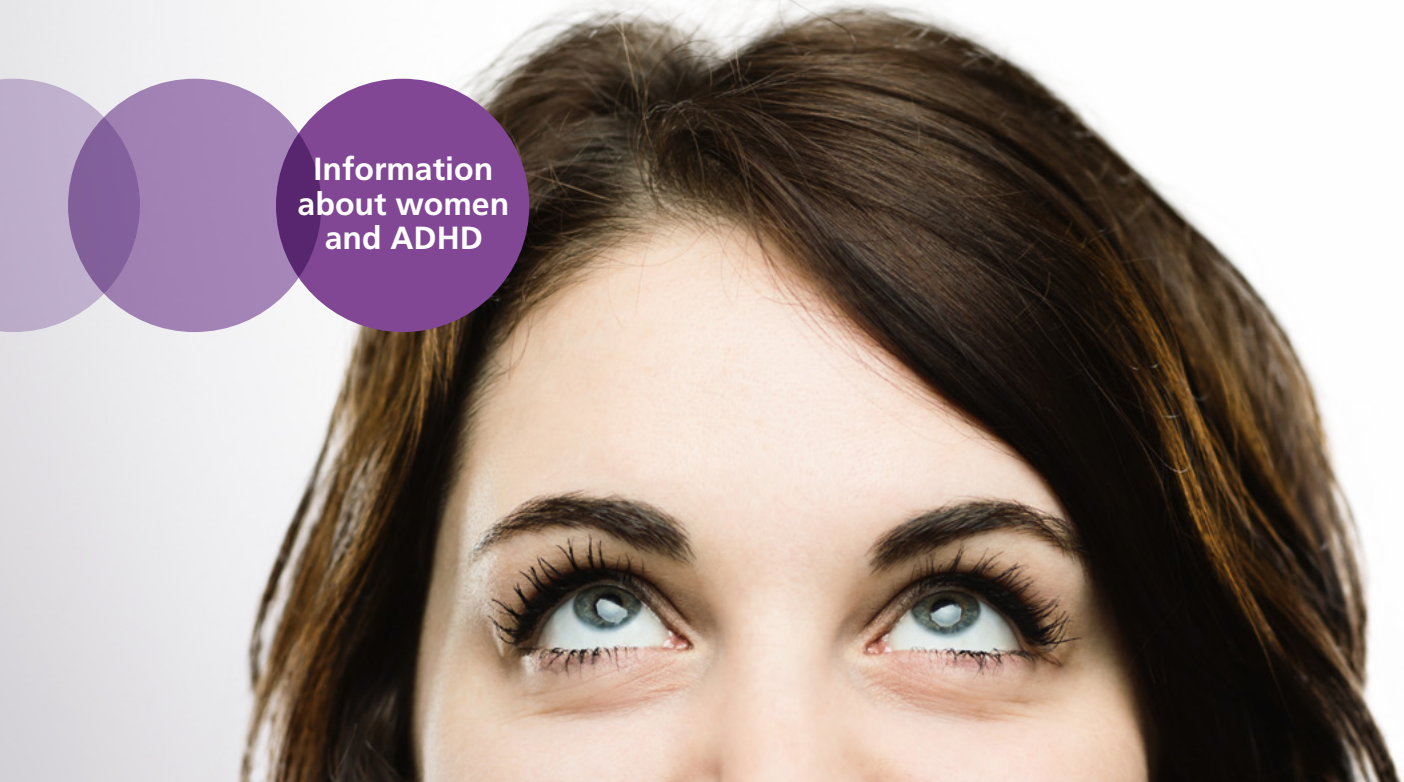
NOTES:

www.biocodex.fi

BIOCODEX

THIS WAS AN EXCEPTIONALLY COMPREHENSIVE REVIEW

Information about women and ADHD



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