What Does ADHD Look Like in Women?

ADHD in women is often missed because it may not match the familiar stereotype of a young boy who is visibly hyperactive. Some women experience distractibility, forgetfulness, internal restlessness, emotional intensity, or difficulty managing everyday responsibilities. Many also learn to hide how hard they are working to keep up.



COMMON WAYS ADHD MAY SHOW UP

Attention
Hard to choose, hold, or shift focus

Tasks
Hard to begin, organize, or finish

Memory
Loses track of information and steps

Restlessness
Racing thoughts, movement, impatience, or impulsivity

ADHD is more likely when these patterns began in childhood, happen regularly, and affect more than one part of life.

ATTENTION AND MEMORY

- ☐ Zones out during conversations
- ☐ Gets deeply absorbed in interesting activities
- ☐ Struggles with repetitive tasks
- ☐ Is easily distracted by sounds, thoughts, or activity
- ☐ Frequently loses important items
- ☐ Forgets appointments without reminders
- ☐ Loses track of thoughts while speaking

TASKS AND DAILY LIFE

- ☐ Has trouble starting tasks
- ☐ Feels frozen when a task has several steps
- ☐ Starts many things but struggles to finish
- ☐ Depends on urgency to get things done
- ☐ Underestimates how long things will take
- ☐ Feels overwhelmed by paperwork or scheduling
- ☐ Uses elaborate systems to stay organized

Other Ways ADHD May Show Up

ADHD does not look the same in every woman. Difficulties may become more visible when responsibilities increase, support decreases, or earlier coping strategies stop being enough.

EMOTIONS AND SENSORY EXPERIENCES

- ☐ Feels emotions quickly and intensely
- ☐ Has trouble thinking clearly when upset
- ☐ Needs longer to recover after conflict or criticism
- ☐ Becomes overwhelmed by noise, clutter, or interruptions
- ☐ Feels ashamed after a strong emotional reaction

MASKING AND COMPENSATION

- ☐ Works much longer than other people realize
- ☐ Rehearses conversations before they happen
- ☐ Double-checks work repeatedly
- ☐ Hides confusion, forgetfulness, or overwhelm
- ☐ Pushes through exhaustion so no one notices
- ☐ Appears capable while privately struggling

ACROSS DIFFERENT STAGES OF LIFE



School years

- ☐ Daydreams or struggles to listen
- ☐ Forgets assignments or loses supplies
- ☐ Performs well but works much harder than others
- ☐ Is described as sensitive, inconsistent, or disorganized



Adulthood

- ☐ Has trouble managing several areas of life at once
- ☐ Feels capable in one setting but unable to function in another
- ☐ Has difficulty creating structure without outside support
- ☐ Becomes more overwhelmed during parenting or caregiving



Hormonal transitions

- ☐ Notices changes in focus, memory, sleep, or emotions
- ☐ Finds that earlier coping strategies are no longer enough
- ☐ May notice more difficulty before periods or during perimenopause



WHEN TO CONSIDER AN ADHD EVALUATION

Having some of these experiences does not necessarily mean you have ADHD. Consider an evaluation when the patterns have been present since childhood, occur in more than one area of life, regularly interfere with daily functioning, or require excessive effort to manage or hide.

WHAT MAY HELP

- **Notice patterns.** Pay attention to which tasks, settings, and times of day make functioning easier or harder.
- **Reduce memory demands.** Use reminders, written steps, visual cues, timers, and designated places for important items.
- **Make tasks easier to start.** Lower the first step, use body doubling, or begin with only a few minutes.
- **Ask for support.** Clear expectations, written information, fewer interruptions, or recovery time may help.

Osiamis E, Thomas EHX, et al. ADHD and Sex Hormones in Females: A Systematic Review. Journal of Attention Disorders. 2025.

This handout provides general education and is not a diagnostic tool.