

ADHD RESOURCE HUB

ADHD in Girls & Women

Why ADHD is so often missed in girls and women, how it shows up across hormones, pregnancy, and menopause, and what effective treatment looks like.

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- Why under-diagnosis happens
 - Masking, perfectionism, and misdiagnosis
 - Hormones, pregnancy, and menopause
 - Relationships and late diagnosis
 - Why treatment matters, for you and your children

ADHD Can Present Very Differently in Girls & Women

ADHD in girls and women is [often also misdiagnosed](#), and emerging evidence supports having another look if you've been in treatment for other disorders for many years, but have not been getting better.

Many women with ADHD are diagnosed in adulthood, and research has demonstrated it's due to a combination of interesting factors.

61% of women received their ADHD diagnosis during adulthood, compared to 40% of men

25% of women received a diagnosis before age 11, compared to 45% of men

Source: pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/39388378

Why Have Girls and Women Been Overlooked?

Girls are often overlooked as children, internalizing symptoms like hyperactivity, and having more inattentive symptoms. Hormones at puberty might be blamed for more emotional swings than they should be, and girls start to become very adept at masking, which hides their symptoms from detection.

While some adapting to adversity certainly proves beneficial at times, without the underlying insights about why such vigilance to organization, for example, is necessary, adaptations run the risk of becoming maladaptive, like perfectionism.

Women are also more likely to be misdiagnosed as what the presenting symptoms might suggest, with anxiety or depression, and never actually having a chance to receive the most effective treatments for what has led to the anxiety and depression in the first place.

"Distracted from their own self-care, women with ADHD postpone checkups and procedures, and function with serious sleep deficits. Inconsistent eating patterns, shaped by inattention and impulsivity, can result in complications. Chronically stressed, they may depend on prescription medications to manage anxiety, mood disorders, sleep, or pain, or they may self-medicate with alcohol or drugs."

Ellen Littman, Ph.D., clinical psychologist

It's Not a Benign Situation

Brain-driven dopamine seeking behaviours in women manifest in similar ways to men: finding [efficient hits in food](#), sex, work, and driving, interpersonal conflict, and a cycle of lower self-esteem, underemployment, and not living up to their potential.

In addition to a higher risk of additive co-morbid conditions, like anxiety, depression, substance use, or complex PTSD, ADHD also comes with a higher relative [mortality rate](#), due in large part to risky and impulsive decisions leading to more accidents. Women have double the mortality rate of men with ADHD.

Did you know?

Women with ADHD are 6 times more likely than neurotypical mothers to experience postpartum anxiety, and 5 times more likely to experience postpartum depression. (Andersson et al., 2023)

The Science About Women

Current research describes why girls and women are understood to have a unique presentation of ADHD.

- [Females with ADHD: an expert consensus statement taking a lifespan approach to identification and treatment in girls and women](#)
- [A list of ADHD symptoms as they present in girls](#)
- [Co-occurring functional problems in girls and women, by age](#)
- [Why ADHD in Women is Routinely Dismissed, Misdiagnosed, and Treated Inadequately](#), by Dr. Ellen Littman
- [A Review of Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder in Women and Girls: Uncovering This Hidden Diagnosis](#)

ADHD and Interactions with Hormones

- [Potential Hormonal Mechanisms of ADHD and Major Depressive Disorder: A New Perspective](#)
- [The Complete Picture: How Estrogen Affects Women with ADHD](#)
- [Changing Estrogen Levels Affect Women's ADHD Symptoms](#)
- [Reproductive Steroids and ADHD Symptoms Across the Menstrual Cycle](#)
- [Could ADHD Medications Improve Memory, Focus and Organization in Menopausal Women? The Research Says Yes](#)
- [The Etiology of Premenstrual Dysphoric Disorder: five interwoven pieces](#)

ADHD and Pregnancy, Postpartum, and Menopause

Pregnancy

- [In utero exposure to ADHD medication and long-term offspring outcomes](#)
- [The effects of drugs used to treat ADHD on pregnancy outcome and breast feeding: a critical review](#)
- [The Course of ADHD during Pregnancy, Journal of Attention Disorders](#)
- [How ADHD affects pregnancy outcomes in women and their babies](#)
- [Good news: more data on the use of ADHD medications during pregnancy](#)

Postpartum

- [Study: ADHD Increases Risk for Postpartum Depression, Anxiety](#)

Menopause

- [ADHD Impairment Peaks in Menopause](#), according to an ADDitude reader survey
- [How effective and safe are stimulant medications for older adults?](#)

ADHD and Relationships

- [Why Women With ADHD Are More At Risk of Gaslighting and Coercive Control](#)
- [The lost girls: chaotic and curious, women with ADHD all have missed red flags that haunt us](#)
- [Reasons Why It's Tough to Keep Friends When You Have ADHD](#)
- [The challenges faced by teens with ADHD](#)
- [ADHD, Women, and the Danger of Emotional Withdrawal](#)
- [Behavioral Treatment for the Social-Emotional Difficulties of Preadolescent and Adolescent Girls with ADHD](#)

ADHD and Late Diagnosis

- [The Reckoning: reflecting on a late ADHD diagnosis as an adult](#), by Christina Crowe
- [ADHD in adults can be life-threatening when left untreated, according to experts](#)
- [Late Diagnosis: Was ADHD to Blame All Along?](#)
- [ADHD in Adults Looks Different. Most Diagnostic Criteria Ignores This Fact](#)
- [A Critical Need Ignored: Inadequate Diagnosis and Treatment of ADHD After Age 60](#)
- [Anxiety? Depression? Or ADHD? It Could Be All Three](#)
- [Untreated ADHD Reduces Life Expectancy](#)

ADHD Treatment Is Very Effective

For mothers in particular, research supports that mothers who are treated have children who also do better with their own ADHD management.

Medications reduce ADHD symptoms in parents

- ✓ [A recent study](#) showed parents taking medication experienced less negative talk and fewer negative commands, and gave more praise.
- ✓ It also reduced negative and inappropriate behaviours in their children.

Studies suggest that treating ADHD in adults with medication will also improve some parenting skills. Parenting is a skill that must be learned, and because ADHD interferes with learning, parents with the disorder need time to learn these skills.

Medication can eliminate some of the most difficult behaviours, but ADHD-trained therapists can also provide behavioural therapies that help ADHD parents build parenting skills and achieve their full potential as parents.

Curious about assessment for yourself, or your child?

[Ask us about our Family Assessment rates.](#)



NEXT STEPS

Ready to Talk to Someone?

Dig A Little Deeper offers neurodivergent-affirming ADHD assessment and treatment for girls and women across our Ontario locations, alongside a wide network of therapists and coaches.

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In crisis, or worried about safety? Call or text 9-8-8 for the Suicide Crisis Helpline, available across Canada, 24 hours a day.

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