

ADHD Symptoms Checklist for Women

Recognizing how ADHD actually presents in adult women

A note before you begin. This checklist is not a diagnostic tool — only a qualified clinician can diagnose ADHD. What it can do is help you recognize patterns in your experience and give you language to describe them. You do not need to check everything. ADHD is not about a perfect score. It is about whether there is a persistent pattern across settings and over time.

Section 1: Attention and Focus

Women with ADHD rarely struggle to pay attention to everything. More often, attention is inconsistent — deeply focused on some things, completely unavailable for others.

- I frequently lose track of conversations, especially in groups or when there is background noise
- I reread the same paragraph multiple times without absorbing it
- I start tasks and leave them unfinished — not because I stopped caring, but because my attention just moved on
- I can hyperfocus on something that interests me for hours, but struggle to start or sustain tasks that feel boring or obligatory
- I zone out mid-conversation even when I genuinely want to be present
- I forget what I walked into a room to do, even if it was seconds ago
- I make careless mistakes on things I actually know how to do
- I often have to ask people to repeat themselves — not because I didn't hear them, but because I wasn't quite there
- My attention drifts to whatever is most stimulating, not whatever is most important
- I have a hard time reading long documents or watching things without subtitles

Section 2: Internal Hyperactivity

The hyperactivity in ADHD often does not look like running around. In women, it typically lives inside — a racing, restless mind that rarely goes quiet.

- My mind is almost always running, even when I want it to stop
- I find it hard to relax without doing something at the same time — watching TV while scrolling, listening to a podcast while cleaning
- I talk fast, talk a lot, or feel a strong urge to say things before the moment passes
- I move through tasks, rooms, or projects quickly and impulsively, often before I've finished what I was doing

- I feel physically restless — tapping, fidgeting, needing to move — especially in situations that require stillness
- I get bored extremely quickly, even with things I chose to do
- I struggle to sit through meetings, movies, or events without feeling an almost physical need to leave or move
- I feel like there is always a low hum of urgency or restlessness underneath the surface, even on calm days
- I interrupt people, finish their sentences, or blurt things out — not rudely, but because the thought feels like it will disappear if I don't say it now
- I make impulsive decisions, purchases, commitments, or changes that I later have to manage the consequences of

Section 3: Executive Functioning

Executive functioning is the brain's management system — planning, prioritizing, starting, shifting, and completing tasks. These are areas where ADHD creates the most friction in daily life.

- I know exactly what I need to do and still cannot make myself start it
- I underestimate how long things will take, consistently
- I miss deadlines, appointments, or obligations because managing time is genuinely hard for me
- My living space, car, bag, or email inbox often reflects my internal state: chaotic, even when I have tried to organize it
- I rely heavily on alarms, lists, and reminders, and still miss things
- When I have multiple things to do, I often freeze and do none of them
- I put off tasks I find boring or aversive until they become urgent, then do them in a panic
- I lose things constantly: keys, phone, glasses, important papers
- Transitions are hard — switching from one task to another takes more effort than it seems like it should
- I have brilliant ideas, intentions, and plans that never seem to make it into action
- I am often late, even when I try hard not to be
- I have trouble estimating how much time I need to get ready, leave, or complete a task

Section 4: Memory

ADHD affects working memory — the brain's ability to hold and use information in the short term. This is different from forgetting things you never knew. It is forgetting things you absolutely knew, moments before.

- I forget things people told me recently — not distant past, but last week or yesterday

- I walk away from conversations and immediately lose the thread
- I know I was just thinking something important and it is simply gone
- I have to write everything down immediately or it disappears
- I forget to respond to messages even though I absolutely intended to
- I forget to take medication, even when I have been taking it for months
- My memory feels unreliable in a way that makes me doubt myself
- I remember random, irrelevant information vividly but forget practical things constantly
- I lose track of what I am saying while I am saying it
- I start one task, get pulled into another, and forget to return to the original one

Section 5: Emotional Symptoms

Emotional symptoms are one of the most overlooked parts of ADHD in women — and often the ones that cause the most suffering. Feelings can arrive fast, feel intense, and be difficult to manage or recover from.

- My emotions feel more intense than other people's — not more dramatic, just bigger and faster
- Small frustrations can trigger a disproportionately strong reaction that I often regret afterward
- I have very low tolerance for boredom, waiting, or situations I cannot control
- Criticism — even mild, well-intentioned criticism — can feel devastating and stay with me far longer than it should
- I experience sudden mood shifts that feel confusing even to me
- I get overwhelmed quickly when there is too much happening at once
- I feel shame easily, often triggered by making mistakes or falling short of what I think I should be doing
- I replay interactions, conversations, and mistakes repeatedly — even when I know it is not helpful
- When something interests me, I feel it completely. When it doesn't, I feel almost nothing.
- I am highly sensitive to rejection, exclusion, or the possibility that someone is disappointed in me

If criticism sensitivity or emotional reactivity strongly resonates, you may also want to read about [Rejection Sensitive Dysphoria \(RSD\)](#) in women with ADHD, which is very common and often goes unrecognized.

Section 6: Masking Behaviors

Masking is what happens when a person with ADHD learns that her natural way of being is not acceptable and develops strategies to appear organized, attentive, and capable. These strategies can hide the diagnosis. They do not prevent the exhaustion that comes with maintaining them.

- I work much harder than others seem to in order to produce similar results
- I appear more organized, calm, or capable than I feel internally
- I have spent years developing systems and workarounds to compensate for how my brain works
- I keep my struggles very private — most people would be surprised to know how hard everyday life is for me

- I've been told I'm 'fine,' 'too smart to have ADHD,' or 'not the type' — and I've half believed it

- I perform well in structured environments but fall apart the moment the structure is gone
- I hold everything together until I get home, then completely collapse
- I feel like I am playing a role — a competent, functional version of myself — and it is exhausting

- I avoid situations where my struggles might become visible
- I have internalized words like 'too sensitive,' 'scattered,' 'all over the place,' or 'a lot' as character flaws

Masking is one reason so many women with ADHD are diagnosed late — often not until their 30s, 40s, or beyond.

Section 7: Sleep and Energy

ADHD does not turn off at bedtime. For many women, the brain actually becomes more active when the stimulation and obligations of the day fall away.

- I frequently cannot fall asleep even when I'm exhausted, because my mind won't stop
- I often get my best thinking done late at night
- I stay up far later than I intend to — not choosing to, exactly, but unable to make myself stop

- Once I am asleep, I sleep heavily and have a very hard time waking up
- I feel groggy and disoriented for a long time after waking
- No amount of sleep seems to fully fix how tired I feel
- I go through cycles of high energy and deep crashes
- My energy is unpredictable — I never quite know which version of myself I'll wake up as
- My ADHD symptoms seem worse during PMS, postpartum, perimenopause, or other times of hormonal fluctuation

Section 8: The Chronic Weight of Effort

This section is not a symptom list. It is a description of what daily life can feel like when ADHD has been unrecognized and unaddressed for years.

- I feel like I have to work twice as hard as everyone else just to keep up

- I have a constant low-level awareness that I am behind, even when I'm not sure what I'm behind on
- I have a complicated relationship with the word 'lazy' — I know it isn't accurate, but the shame of it lives in me
- I have been let down by myself so many times that I've stopped trusting my own intentions
- I know I am capable of more than I consistently produce, and I don't know why the gap exists
- I feel like something is wrong with me, even if I can't name what it is
- I've spent years wondering why things that seem easy for others are so hard for me
- I look functional from the outside, but everyday life feels much harder than anyone realizes

What to do with your results

There is no score that confirms or rules out ADHD. What you are looking for is a pattern — a persistent, cross-context set of experiences that has been present over time and affects multiple areas of life. If many of these items resonated, it may be worth seeking an evaluation from a clinician who understands how ADHD presents in adult women.

Before an appointment, it helps to:

- *Write down specific examples of symptoms across different settings — work, home, relationships*
- *Note when you first remember these struggles showing up, even if they looked different in childhood*
- *Bring a copy of this checklist if it helps you describe your experience*
- *Note related concerns such as anxiety, depression, burnout, sleep problems, or hormonal symptom shifts*

If you are in North or South Carolina, Kristen McClure, MSW, LCSW offers specialized ADHD therapy for women grounded in nearly 30 years of clinical experience. Her approach is neurodivergent-affirming — we start from the premise that your brain is not broken. Learn more at kristen-mcclure-therapist.com

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