

# Cluttered thoughts and overwhelm... “How an ADHD diagnosis helped me”

Forgetfulness and lack of attention as we get older are usually something a doctor would consider as early signs of dementia — but many are finding that their executive functioning issues could actually be ADHD, gone unnoticed since childhood.

Adult ADHD (attention deficit hyperactivity disorder) diagnoses are on the rise. Official figures show that the number of people being treated for ADHD in the UK has risen by 80% in five years. Yet there are still many women who are undiagnosed. It's said that 50 to 75% of the one million women in the UK with ADHD are undiagnosed and may be experiencing unnecessary poor health and socioeconomic outcomes as a result.

This diagnosis gap could have something to do with how women's ADHD symptoms present differently to men, especially in childhood. As clinical psychologist and host of The Aspiring Psychologist podcast, Marianne Trent ([goodthinkingpsychology.co.uk](http://goodthinkingpsychology.co.uk)), explains, “It is common for the condition to go undetected in women. This is partly due to changes in awareness levels and increased communication about our individual struggles. However, it is also more commonly missed in females because the way in which we present might not pose as many management difficulties in classrooms and workplaces as some of the more immediately noticeable symptoms.”

“It's commonly reported that women tend to be the ones who suffer silently and are more likely to internalise the reasons for our struggles as ourselves, thinking we are being silly, chaotic or disorganised.”

WITH MORE ADULT WOMEN IN THE UK BEING DIAGNOSED WITH ADHD, **ADRIANNE WEBSTER** SPEAKS TO THOSE WHO SAY GETTING DIAGNOSED HAS REVOLUTIONISED THEIR LIVES.

“Women tend to be the ones who suffer silently.”



Bella Day

“There is a huge misconception around ADHD in women,” agrees goldsmith and jeweller Bella Day ([theremarkablegoldsmiths.co.uk](http://theremarkablegoldsmiths.co.uk)), who has recently been diagnosed with ADHD. “People say, ‘But you don't seem hyperactive, you don't seem like you are bouncing off the walls...’ but ADHD in women manifests differently and you will often see women over-achieve as

compensation for what they see as their flaky behaviour. I was one of the top 100 female entrepreneurs of the year and I am a fellow of the Institute of Professional Goldsmiths, so people wouldn't assume I have ADHD.”

“Having my diagnosis has helped me hugely with my life and in my work. I always felt flaky because I couldn't remember things like appointments, and I wasn't good at tasks I found frustrating, such as business admin. My diagnosis has allowed me to be more kind to myself. I'm not disorganised, I just need help with some day-to-day tasks.”

## What do the symptoms of ADHD look like?

Recent findings show that women are educating themselves around the symptoms of ADHD and are taking steps to find out for themselves if they could potentially have it. Around 7,700 women took an online test verified by health professionals to see if they have ADHD in 2019, and this figure soared to around 254,400 women in 2020.

There are three types of ADHD; predominantly inattentive, predominantly hyperactive and combined. “Some of the common symptoms to look out for with the inattentive subtype include difficulties in planning, concentrating, organising and prioritising,” explains Marianne. “It may also crop up in having apparent time blindness — being unable to work out how long particular tasks might take, so people with ADHD can often be late or arrive in a flustered state.”

“Some of the features of the impulsivity and hyperactivity subtype include fiddling with things while sitting down, sitting in constrained positions or spinning or rocking on a chair, finding it hard to wait your turn in conversations or rushing into courses of action without full consideration of the implications. It is possible to have features of one or both subtypes. Both subtypes would be referred to as fulfilling the combined subtype for ADHD.” »

AROUND  
**ONE IN 20**  
ADULTS IS  
ESTIMATED  
TO HAVE  
**ADHD**

Only  
approximately  
**10-20%**  
of individuals  
with ADHD will  
be treated



## How is it treated?

“Some common management tools for symptoms of ADHD might include using planners or reminder functions on your phone. It may also include asking others to help with scheduling or lightening some of the load to reduce overwhelm,” suggests Marianne.

“People can also find a period of therapy with a clinician such as a clinical psychologist really helpful in working through the diagnosis and making sense of what it means and how to optimise your functioning with the condition.

“Medication takes the form of stimulants that help to activate parts of the brain that you are usually having to self-stimulate to get online. When medicated, people may notice that it is easier to concentrate, to plan and to feel less overwhelmed.

“They may also notice they are less likely to fiddle and to be able to sit still for longer periods of time while maintaining focus, and wondering if ‘everyone else’ has always felt like this as it can feel like a night and day change for them.”

**“MANY PEOPLE COME TO THINK OF THE WAY THEIR BRAIN WORKS AS A REAL SUPERPOWER.”**



## A Diagnosis

A diagnosis isn't a cure-all, but if you think you may have some traits of ADHD and would like to find out more, make an appointment with your GP to discuss further and see if you could benefit from a referral. It's a good idea to take a list of what you recognise as potentially being ADHD symptoms to jog your memory.

Being diagnosed with something like ADHD has often carried a stigma, affecting people in school, the workplace, and relationships, but Bella says a diagnosis has really benefited her. “Having a diagnosis has allowed me to make peace with myself somewhat. I do always have the nagging little voice telling me I am a failure and not good enough, but I've created ways to support myself. In general, it has been a huge bonus for me to get my diagnosis.”

Marianne agrees that a diagnosis can be a positive thing. “Please bear in mind that this is not something ‘wrong’ with you and there is no shame inherent in fulfilling a diagnosis. In fact, many people come to think of the way their brain works as being a real superpower and bringing many wonderful features to the fore, too.”

**If you think you might have ADHD, please head to [nhs.uk](https://www.nhs.uk) to find out more information and support.**

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**Depression is almost three times more prevalent in adults with ADHD, and nearly half of all adults with ADHD also have bipolar spectrum disorder.**



## “Being diagnosed was a relief.”

**CEO AND FOUNDER OF VIBRANT THINKING (VIBRANT-THINKING.COM) LORNA WATKINSON shares about how her ADHD diagnosis has helped her connect better with herself and her family.**

“I first started to consider getting diagnosed when my daughter was going through the diagnosis process. I'd signed up for a course for parents to better understand their children with ADHD and during that course, there were several times where I thought, ‘This is me/this is what I do’, which started me thinking maybe I had ADHD as well. Since having the diagnosis myself, I have also discovered several members of the family who have also been diagnosed with ADHD who reached out when I started talking about it on social media.

“The overwhelming feeling of being diagnosed was one of relief. I've always known that there were aspects of me, what I believed were simply my character, that held me back from achieving at work, in my business and life generally, but to finally understand that there was a reason for this was a huge moment for me — it wasn't that I was flawed.

“It has helped me find the right support to continue to build my business. I work with NeurOkay who offer training and coaching to neurodiverse business owners, and I finally have the right people in place to support me through the procrastination,

rejection sensitivity and leaping from idea to idea with no implementation that comes with ADHD. I'm still at the early stages of this, but progress is being made in the right direction. I was close to giving up both my businesses prior to this diagnosis.

“It's also helped me better connect with my mother and brother — we are a close family but there were times when I felt like I didn't belong, and when my brother Ben and I would get so frustrated with each other. But now I know it's because we process things so differently. It's brought us closer together.

“ADHD is part of the wonderful, diverse world that we live in. People with ADHD see the world differently and can see different solutions to challenges versus neurotypical and it's vital that these perspectives are shared. Getting a diagnosis is a personal choice — not everyone wants a diagnosis and that's fine. But for some people, myself included, it has been such a hugely important part of understanding myself and being able to move on, make changes to how I approach things that make me more effective and be braver with how I interact with the world!” ■