

What It Feels Like to Live with Undiagnosed ADHD

You were ashamed of your messy home, your missed appointments, and your wandering mind... until you realized they weren't personal faults; they were symptoms. *ADDitude* readers share what it feels like to live with the invisible condition of ADHD before a diagnosis.

by the editors and readers of ADDitude

A Hidden Condition

[ADHD in women](#) is often overlooked. The most noticeable symptoms, like hyperactivity, manifest differently in boys and are too often disregarded as "ditzzy" behavior in girls. Plus, the inattentive symptoms more commonly seen in girls are commonly mistaken for something else.

Living with an unrecognized condition can lead to years of low self-esteem and shame until a diagnosis shines a light on why everything has been so hard for so long. *ADDitude* readers and experts share what it felt like living with undiagnosed adult ADHD. Can you relate?

1. Running on Empty

"All my life, I had struggled with a vague sense that something was different about me. I felt inferior, inadequate, undisciplined, and [hopelessly disorganized](#) — all feelings that have been, at one time or another, reinforced by others in my life... I had gotten used to feeling tired before I even got out of bed, of dreading the new day and its various obligations. I was exhausted, struggling at work and at home with my kids. It took every ounce of physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual strength to live my life — until I finally met someone who listened to my story and gave me a chance to do something about it." —Donna Surgenor Reames

2. Like You Belong on Mars

"You feel '[different](#).' You are told you're lazy, not trying hard enough, a space cadet, and that you aren't living up to your potential. You'd lose your head if it wasn't attached. For 30 years. Good times." — Sarah C.

3. Everyone is Laughing Behind Your Back

"[Living with undiagnosed ADHD](#) trained me to feel inept. In grown-up situations, I never expected to be taken seriously. I was always afraid that everyone was sniggering at me behind my back. The fear was all in my head." — Zoë Kessler

4. Like You're Wearing Blinders

"Some undiagnosed [ADHDers](#) think they are living a normal life. Then you find out there is nothing normal about reading 350 romance novels in three years while your finances, house, and life fall down around you." — An *ADDitude* blogger

5. Always Stumbling

"I was one of those [ADD people](#) who fall through the cracks. I didn't have trouble in school, and the problems that showed up later in life weren't obvious to others. I never felt lazy or stupid. I always knew I was talented, but I would stumble over all sorts of things. I couldn't seem to get stuff done. I felt thwarted. Being diagnosed with ADHD changed my life. I call the diagnosis my 'Rosetta Stone,' because behavior that I had never been able to understand suddenly made sense." — Sally Harris

6. Quieter than the Rest

"I grew up in a large Cuban extended family. Like most kids with inattentive ADHD, I was not a happy-go-lucky, gregarious child. I was introverted, [anxious](#), finicky, uncoordinated, and distracted, but the fact that I was quiet was a blessing in my home. I was often the only person in our crowded house who was not talking." – Tess Messer

7. Winging it All the Time

"At 35 years old, I worked it out myself. [Motherhood](#) was my undoing. I couldn't 'wing it' any longer. The official diagnosis was a massive relief. Finally I had an explanation! Meds have changed my life; now I can cope! Yes, my house may feel disorganized, but at least I can keep on top of all the basics and not feel completely overwhelmed ALL the time, just some of it." – Jodi H.

8. Like a Puzzle That Doesn't Fit Together

"As early as grade school, I wrote an essay titled 'The Different Child.' I've spent my life wondering, Why aren't the pieces fitting together? I'm always getting [lost in conversations](#). When something's important, like directions, or something that has to do with a sequence, I can't follow it. I can't hear the information and store it." – Debbie Young

9. Always Bored

"I was hired, promoted, and then fired, or I quit out of [frustration or boredom](#). I understand now that I am easily bored, and I stopped blaming everyone else for being boring. I learned to stay engaged in conversations by pretending it's a first date." – Eva Pettinato

10. Like You Want to Run and Hide

"My classes were so overwhelming, I remember staring at the classroom doorknob, [wanting to run away](#). So I did. I just left school and walked home one day." – Joanne Griffin

11. Ashamed

"Like most moms, I had always believed I should be able to manage the household, take care of the kids, keep food on hand, and so on. But I couldn't, and [I felt ashamed](#)." – Terry Matlen

12. Like a Flibberdegibbit

"I have never been able to save enough money. I would [spend impulsively](#), and pay my bills whenever I could remember. I felt like I would never be able to have a decent credit rating or buy a house. It's tough for anyone these days, let alone a fliberdegibbit (as my mom used to call me) like me!" – Cindy H.

Resources for Women with ADHD

There's hope! Use these resources to move forward after an ADHD diagnosis. Once you have a handle on your symptoms, nothing can stop you from achieving your dreams.

[So This is What Normal Feels Like](#)

[Winning with ADHD](#)

[Late Bloomer](#)

[Famous Female Powerhouses with ADHD](#)

[12 Things You Don't Know About me and my ADHD](#)

[The Truth About ADHD in Women](#)