

# ADHD and the menstrual cycle

## Information for patients

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### What is this leaflet about?

**This information is for you if you have, or think you might have, ADHD and want to know more about how your reproductive stage could affect your symptoms and what to do about it.**

This leaflet provides an overview of how reproductive stages in females can impact ADHD symptoms according to published research. This area has not been studied extensively, so little can be said with certainty. The leaflet suggests some strategies and directs you to some resources to help you navigate and better understand these transitions. This leaflet will cover the menstrual cycle, perimenopause, menopause and briefly cover pregnancy. It is for people registered female at birth (women, trans men, non-binary), their families or carers, and the general public.

### What is ADHD?

Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) is a condition that affects behaviour. ADHD is known to be underdiagnosed in females.

People with ADHD often also experience anxiety or depression, though these are separate conditions.

Symptoms are grouped into three main categories:

- Inattention
- Impulsivity
- Hyperactivity

People experience these symptoms in different ways. Some may consistently struggle with all three, while others primarily experience one category with occasional symptoms from others. The impact of ADHD also varies from person to person — some individuals find it significantly affects their relationships, work, and self-care, whereas others may only notice challenges in one area of their life.

### What is the impact of the menstrual cycle on ADHD?

- Research suggests the menstrual cycle impacts ADHD symptoms, with certain phases worsening symptoms. These phases seem to be times when oestrogen levels are declining during ovulation and the days just before and during a period.
- However, which phases may impact you and how vary from person to person. Some people are more sensitive to changes in hormone levels than others.
- Keeping a diary to track how your symptoms change alongside the stages of your menstrual cycle can be a helpful tool to detect changes to your ADHD symptoms throughout the menstrual cycle. Try to do this for at least two consecutive months.

- According to research, healthcare experts and people with ADHD, these are some changes experienced throughout the menstrual cycle:
  - ADHD symptoms seem to worsen during the luteal phase, such as: poor concentration, making more impulsive decisions and increased inattentiveness
  - Sensory hypersensitivity changes
  - Your menstrual cycle may affect how well your ADHD medication works
  - Changes to emotional regulation.

## Managing symptoms

- Being aware of how your symptoms change and using self-help techniques is a good first approach.
- The Self-Help Resource Pack for People with ADHD by NHS Lothian has many helpful tools and advice (see 'Useful Web Links' on page 5 of this leaflet), including advice on how to cope with emotional dysregulation.
- Some people choose to adjust their ADHD medication with the help of their psychiatrist depending on if and when their symptoms worsen. For example, increasing their medication dose in the week before their period is due.

However, there are not enough studies on how effective changing your ADHD medication dose according to your menstrual cycle is yet to make firm recommendations.

- This is something you could discuss with your GP or psychiatrist, but it is not standard clinical practice, and some may not be comfortable making changes to the medication.

## What is premenstrual syndrome (PMS)?

Premenstrual syndrome (PMS) are the cyclical symptoms experienced by women in the weeks or days before a period begins. It can affect anyone, and some people are more significantly impacted than others.

If you feel you are significantly impacted by PMS, you should speak to your GP for further advice on potential management or self-help strategies.

For further information on PMS, see the NHS UK Information Page on PMS and the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists PMS patient information leaflet (see 'Useful Web Links' on page 5).

NHS Lothian also has a premenstrual syndrome clinic which your GP can refer you to if specialist help is needed.

## What is premenstrual dysphoric disorder (PMDD)?

A small percentage of people experience a more severe form of PMS called premenstrual dysphoric disorder (PMDD). While the symptoms are similar to PMS, they are much more intense and can significantly impact daily life.

For further information on PMDD, see the NHS UK Information Page on PMS (see 'Useful Web Links; on page 5).

## What is the impact of having ADHD and PMS/PMDD?

Women diagnosed with PMS and PMDD can experience difficulties in skills like coordination, focus, remembering words, short-term memory and reaction time, especially in the luteal phase. Due to this, there may be overlap between the impact of ADHD symptoms worsening and cognitive symptoms due to PMS or PMDD. Some evidence suggests PMDD may be more common in people with ADHD, but more research is needed to be certain.

Often, strategies which help in premenstrual syndrome (PMS) may also help with premenstrual ADHD symptom worsening. It may be helpful to implement self-help strategies for PMS/PMDD and ADHD and to speak to your GP about this. NHS Lothian also has a premenstrual syndrome clinic which your GP can refer you to if specialist help is needed.

## About ADHD diagnosis in NHS Lothian

- Speak to your GP if you think you may have ADHD.
- They will ask you to complete the Adult ADHD Self-Report Scale (ASRS-v1.1) checklist and will evaluate how your symptoms affect your life.
- Based on this information they may make a referral to Mental Health Services.
- Some people meet mild ADHD thresholds but don't go on to be formally diagnosed and may still benefit from self-help tools (see 'Useful Web Links' on page 5).
- You don't need a formal ADHD diagnosis to try out strategies that might help you.

## Screening tool used in NHS Lothian

- NHS Lothian uses a questionnaire called the Adult ADHD Self-Report Scale (ASRS-v1.1) to help identify symptoms of ADHD. However, a diagnosis also depends on the experience and careful assessment of a healthcare professional, who considers your overall situation, history, and how your symptoms affect your daily life.

## What is the impact of menopause and perimenopause on ADHD?

- Perimenopause is when you have symptoms of menopause, but your periods have not yet stopped. You reach menopause when you have not had a period for 12 months.
- Some people may experience cognitive symptoms such as difficulty concentrating or mental fatigue during perimenopause and at the onset of menopause. These symptoms often improve over time.

In general, symptoms of anxiety and depression may intensify during the (peri)menopausal period, and this may be more pronounced in individuals with ADHD.

- Some people are first diagnosed with ADHD during perimenopause, as symptoms become more impactful.
- We are still trying to understand how (peri)menopause affects ADHD.
- It's helpful to be prepared for potential worsening of symptoms and to develop strategies to cope with this transition.
- It is important to be aware that (peri)menopause itself might contribute to some of these cognitive symptoms.

- If you feel you need extra support at this time, contact your GP to explore management options.
- Lifestyle strategies help many people, but some opt for medical treatments, such as hormone replacement therapies (HRT) to manage (peri)menopausal symptoms.
- For more information on managing symptoms of menopause, see the ‘Useful Web Links’ section on page 5, under ‘NHS UK: Hormone replacement therapies (HRT)’ and ‘NICE Guidelines: Menopause: Identification and management’.

## What is the impact of pregnancy on ADHD?

- There is not enough research on how pregnancy affects ADHD.
- If you are thinking of conceiving and are on medication for ADHD, discuss this with your GP or psychiatrist to create a plan for your medication going forward.
- The decision to take medication during pregnancy and breastfeeding is very individual. It is important to weigh up the risks and benefits of medication to both mother and baby and consider any alternatives.
- For the most up-to-date information on safe medication use in pregnancy and breastfeeding see the Bumps and Lactmed websites (see ‘Useful Web Links’ on page 5).
- Research changes over time so be sure to discuss with your GP or psychiatrist and check the up-to-date information on reliable online databases (Bumps and Lactmed, see the ‘Useful Web Links’ section).

The Mindful Birth Group has a helpful article on “Navigating Pregnancy and Childbirth with ADHD” (see ‘Useful Web Links’). But if you ever have any questions or concerns, you can always ask your midwife, nurse or doctor at your check-ups and scans, as well as make an appointment with your GP.

## Further information

- NHS Lothian Self Help Resource Pack (see ‘Useful Web Links’) is a great resource for self-help strategies and information on ADHD.
- Scottish ADHD Adults conducts Edinburgh and Glasgow monthly meet ups, where those with and without diagnosis are welcome.
- The ADDers website has a list of local support groups in Scotland.
- Procrastination Station are a community interest company that offers advice and support to adults with ADHD in Scotland.
- ADDtitude has many webinars and articles with self-help advice, as well as a free subscription and mailing list. Please note that this is US-based, and therefore some medical advice may not apply to UK residents.

## National Groups

- The Scottish ADHD Coalition brings together voluntary groups to provide support for everyone with ADHD and their families in Scotland.
- ADDISS: The attention deficit disorder information and support service are a national charity for ADHD and ADD in the UK.

## Useful Web Links

NHS UK ADHD information page: <a href="http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/adhd-adults/">www.nhs.uk/conditions/adhd-adults/</a>	
NHS Inform ADHD: <a href="http://www.nhsinform.scot/illnesses-and-conditions/mental-health/attention-deficit-hyperactivity-disorder-adhd/">www.nhsinform.scot/illnesses-and-conditions/mental-health/attention-deficit-hyperactivity-disorder-adhd/</a>	
NHS Lothian Self Help Resource Pack: <a href="https://policyonline.nhslothian.scot/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/ADHD_Self_Help_Resource_Pack.pdf">https://policyonline.nhslothian.scot/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/ADHD_Self_Help_Resource_Pack.pdf</a>	
RCOG: Managing premenstrual syndrome (PMS): <a href="http://www.rcog.org.uk/for-the-public/browse-our-patient-information/managing-premenstrual-syndrome-pms/">www.rcog.org.uk/for-the-public/browse-our-patient-information/managing-premenstrual-syndrome-pms/</a>	
NHS UK PMS (premenstrual syndrome) information page: <a href="http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/pre-menstrual-syndrome/">www.nhs.uk/conditions/pre-menstrual-syndrome/</a>	
Bumps (reliable information about medication in pregnancy): <a href="http://www.medicinesinpregnancy.org">www.medicinesinpregnancy.org</a>	
Lactmed (reliable information about medication while breastfeeding): <a href="http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK501922/">www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK501922/</a>	
Navigating Pregnancy and Childbirth with ADHD- The Mindful Birth Group: <a href="http://www.themindfulbirthgroup.com/parents/blog/navigating-pregnancy-and-childbirth-with-adhd/">www.themindfulbirthgroup.com/parents/blog/navigating-pregnancy-and-childbirth-with-adhd/</a>	
NHS UK: Hormone replacement therapies (HRT): <a href="http://www.nhs.uk/medicines/hormone-replacement-therapy-hrt/">www.nhs.uk/medicines/hormone-replacement-therapy-hrt/</a>	

NICE Guidelines - Menopause: Identification and Management: <a href="http://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ng23">www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ng23</a>	
ADDtitude: <a href="http://www.additudemag.com/">www.additudemag.com/</a>	
Scottish ADHD Adults: <a href="https://sites.google.com/site/scottishadhdadultsorg/Home">https://sites.google.com/site/scottishadhdadultsorg/Home</a>	
ADDers: <a href="http://www.adders.org.uk/scotlandmap.htm">www.adders.org.uk/scotlandmap.htm</a>	
Procrastination Station: <a href="https://procrastination-station.co.uk/">https://procrastination-station.co.uk/</a>	
Scottish ADHD Coalition: <a href="http://www.scottishadhdcoalition.org">www.scottishadhdcoalition.org</a>	
ADDISS: <a href="http://www.addiss.co.uk">www.addiss.co.uk</a>	

## Any more questions?

If you have any questions or feedback about this leaflet, contact:  
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