



New Drug Approved for ADHD in Children: Why It's Different



A new non-stimulant treatment for attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) has been approved by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA). This medication, which will be marketed under the brand name Qelbree, is an extended-release capsule that can be sprinkled on food for easy consumption.

- The Food and Drug Administration has approved Qelbree, a new non-stimulant medication for children with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD).
- Experts say there are a limited number of non-stimulant treatments available for children with ADHD.
- They say non-stimulants are less addictive, have fewer side effects, and are easier to refill.

The FDA has approved the drug for children 6 to 17 years of age. ADHD is a mental health disorder typified by hyperactive and impulsive behaviors, trouble focusing attention on single tasks, and difficulty sitting still for long periods of time. About 6.1 million American children have an ADHD diagnosis, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Trusted Source (CDC).

However, experts say treatment options are limited. "There is a misconception that this is an area overcrowded with treatment options, when the majority of the current options are a reformulation of just two stimulant molecules, methylphenidate and amphetamine," said Dr. Andrew J. Cutler, a clinical associate professor of psychiatry at SUNY Upstate Medical University and chief medical officer at the Neuroscience Education Institute, and who consulted on the Qelbree trial.

"Some patients don't respond to or tolerate available medications. There is, therefore, an unmet medical need, and I think it is very exciting to have a new non-stimulant medication option such as Qelbree to offer to my child and adolescent patients with ADHD," he said. There are currently around 30 stimulant medications prescribed to treat ADHD, but only four non-stimulants, Cutler told Healthline. Qelbree is the first newly approved non-stimulant for ADHD treatment in a decade.

Non-stimulant ADHD medications operate essentially in reverse to more traditional stimulant medications, Dr. Jeffrey S. Ditzell, a psychiatrist based in New York City, told Healthline. "ADHD treatments, most notably the stimulant medications, such as Adderall or Ritalin, work to increase norepinephrine and dopamine by facilitating their release and blocking their reuptake in the brain, which can improve concentration, attention, executive functioning, and wakefulness," he said. "This medication works by inhibiting the reuptake of norepinephrine, though the medication's mechanism of action, or the manner in which it exerts its effects in ADHD, remains unclear."

Big benefits for non-stimulants

In addition to being controlled substances with the potential for addiction or misuse, stimulant medications simply don't work for all people, making the debut of drugs such as Qelbree all the more important.

"One problem I've seen in my practice is the limited available medication options when treating ADHD, especially those with comorbid disorders such as anxiety, bipolar disorder, or substance use disorder," Marci Bastien, DNP, PMHNP-BC, a psychiatric nurse practitioner, at Community Psychiatry in Del Mar, California, told Healthline.

"The use of psychostimulants can actually worsen mood symptoms, increase irritability, agitation, and even induce a manic response. Psychostimulants are not recommended for patients with a comorbid substance use disorder to avoid abuse or dependency. Other medical conditions such as seizure disorder, cardiac disorder, or other medical conditions can further limit medication options," she said.

Non-stimulant drugs have other benefits as well.

"They're not controlled medications, making it easier for patients to access this medication and obtain refills and are not as activating, and thus can work for longer periods of time without causing side effects like insomnia and anxiety, which are often an issue with stimulant medications," Dr. Pavan Madan, another psychiatrist at Community Psychiatry, told Healthline.

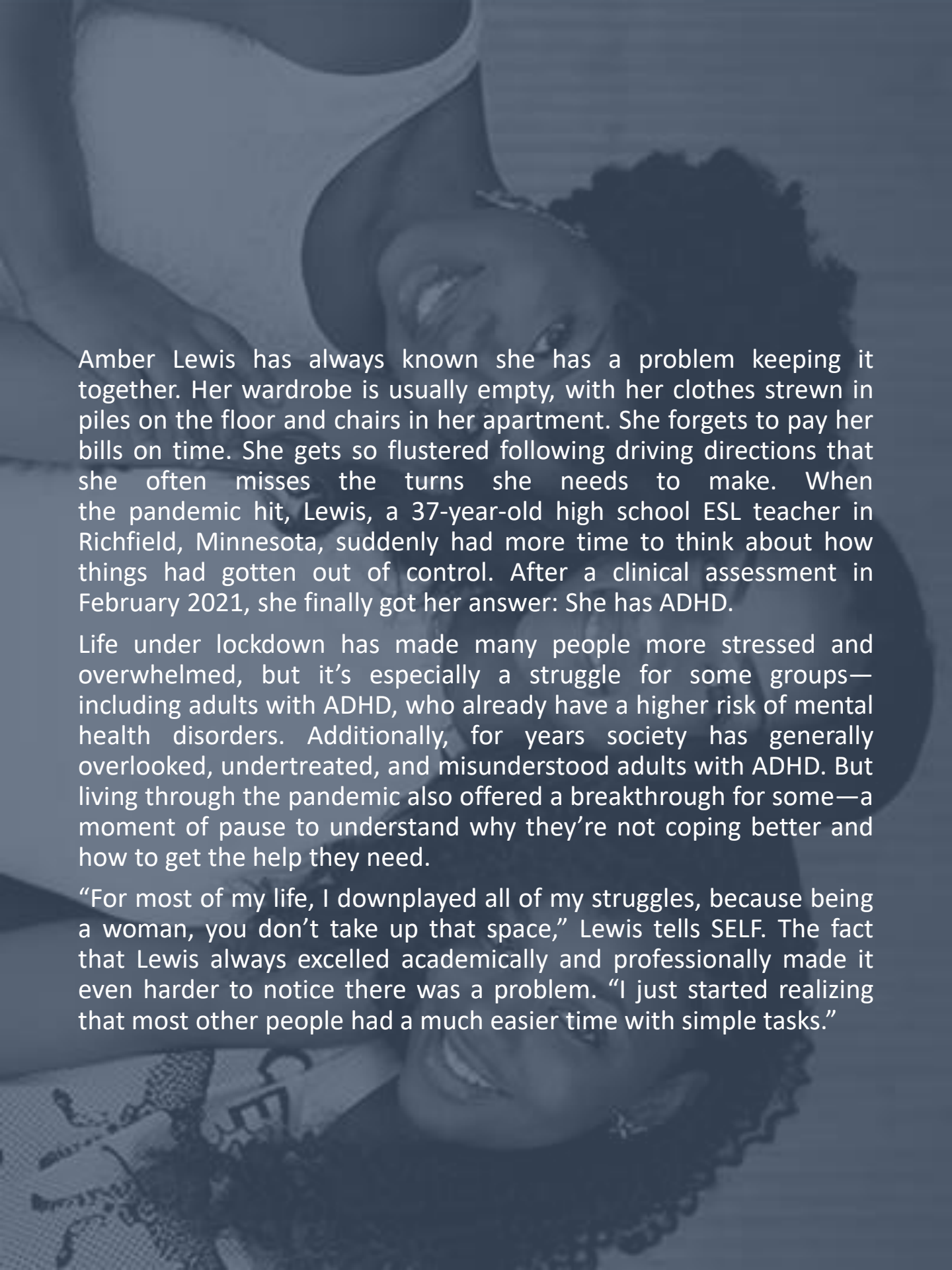
Cutler agreed.

"Qelbree has been shown to work relatively quickly, within the first one-to-two weeks, with straightforward dosing," he said.



How the Pandemic Is Helping Some Women Realize They Have ADHD

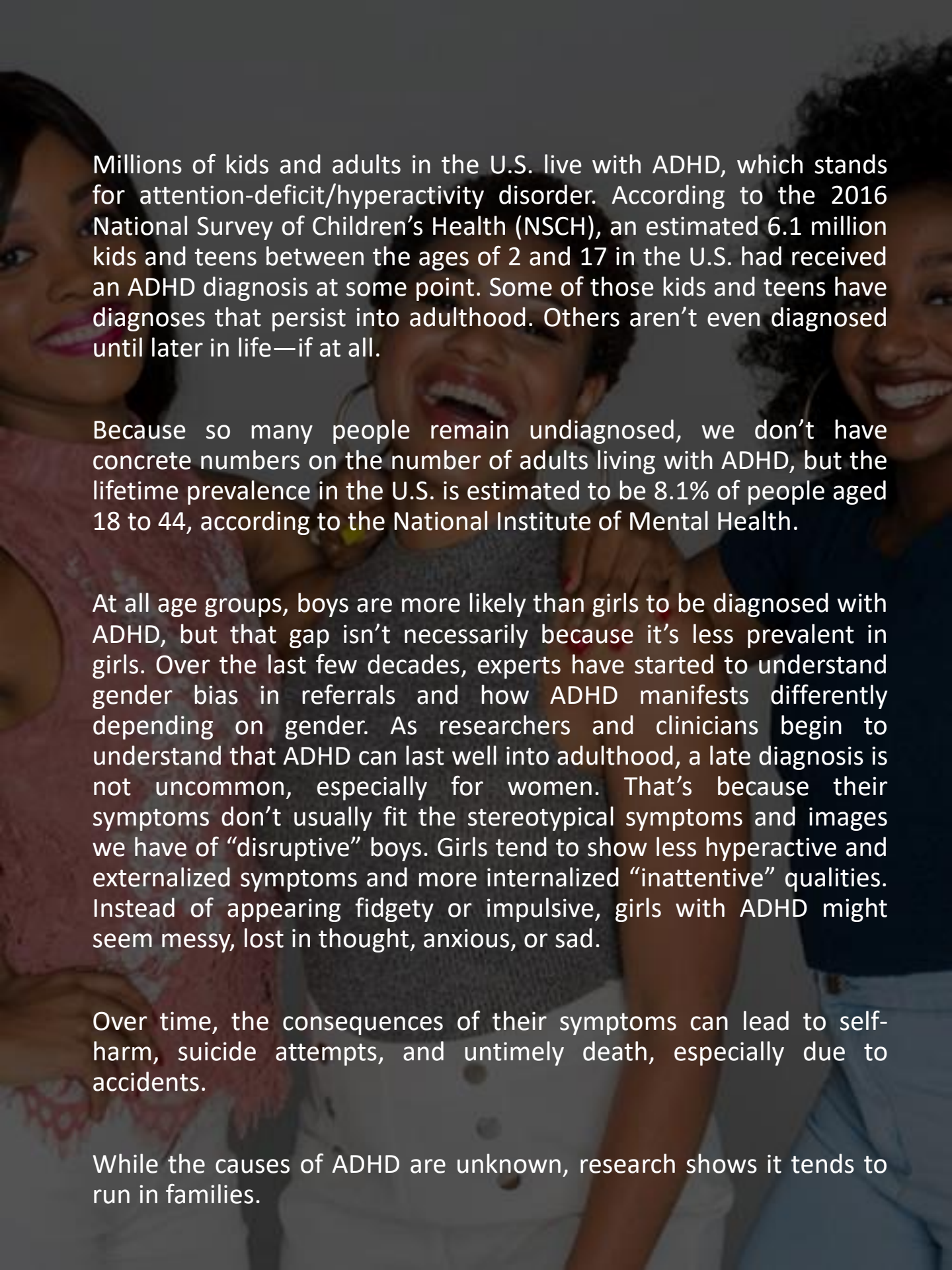
Life under lockdown comes with particular struggles for women with this condition.



Amber Lewis has always known she has a problem keeping it together. Her wardrobe is usually empty, with her clothes strewn in piles on the floor and chairs in her apartment. She forgets to pay her bills on time. She gets so flustered following driving directions that she often misses the turns she needs to make. When the pandemic hit, Lewis, a 37-year-old high school ESL teacher in Richfield, Minnesota, suddenly had more time to think about how things had gotten out of control. After a clinical assessment in February 2021, she finally got her answer: She has ADHD.

Life under lockdown has made many people more stressed and overwhelmed, but it's especially a struggle for some groups—including adults with ADHD, who already have a higher risk of mental health disorders. Additionally, for years society has generally overlooked, undertreated, and misunderstood adults with ADHD. But living through the pandemic also offered a breakthrough for some—a moment of pause to understand why they're not coping better and how to get the help they need.

“For most of my life, I downplayed all of my struggles, because being a woman, you don't take up that space,” Lewis tells SELF. The fact that Lewis always excelled academically and professionally made it even harder to notice there was a problem. “I just started realizing that most other people had a much easier time with simple tasks.”

A photograph of three young women laughing together, overlaid with a semi-transparent dark grey filter. The woman on the left is wearing a pink top, the middle one a grey top, and the right one a blue top. They are all smiling broadly and looking towards the camera.

Millions of kids and adults in the U.S. live with ADHD, which stands for attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder. According to the 2016 National Survey of Children's Health (NSCH), an estimated 6.1 million kids and teens between the ages of 2 and 17 in the U.S. had received an ADHD diagnosis at some point. Some of those kids and teens have diagnoses that persist into adulthood. Others aren't even diagnosed until later in life—if at all.

Because so many people remain undiagnosed, we don't have concrete numbers on the number of adults living with ADHD, but the lifetime prevalence in the U.S. is estimated to be 8.1% of people aged 18 to 44, according to the National Institute of Mental Health.

At all age groups, boys are more likely than girls to be diagnosed with ADHD, but that gap isn't necessarily because it's less prevalent in girls. Over the last few decades, experts have started to understand gender bias in referrals and how ADHD manifests differently depending on gender. As researchers and clinicians begin to understand that ADHD can last well into adulthood, a late diagnosis is not uncommon, especially for women. That's because their symptoms don't usually fit the stereotypical symptoms and images we have of "disruptive" boys. Girls tend to show less hyperactive and externalized symptoms and more internalized "inattentive" qualities. Instead of appearing fidgety or impulsive, girls with ADHD might seem messy, lost in thought, anxious, or sad.

Over time, the consequences of their symptoms can lead to self-harm, suicide attempts, and untimely death, especially due to accidents.

While the causes of ADHD are unknown, research shows it tends to run in families.

According to the latest edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-V)*, which is how health care providers formally diagnose ADHD, you can have one of three types: hyperactive/impulsive, inattentive, or combined. Although the criteria have been updated over the years, ADHD experts agree that the evaluation still skews toward typical male symptoms because for decades the research focused on boys. This can make it harder to diagnose the condition in girls and women, which is complicated even further by the fact that ADHD often occurs alongside other mental and behavioral disorders. The issue of underdiagnosis becomes even more complex when factoring in race; Black girls and women are often underdiagnosed and undertreated when it comes to ADHD. The potential reasons why are multifaceted, including barriers to health care access and assumptions that Black children with ADHD are simply “defiant,” not potentially in need of help.

With researchers just beginning to understand how gender relates to ADHD, there is less data on prevalence among trans and gender-nonconforming people, but early studies suggest the rate could be even higher in this group.

Many of the women who miss early treatment have experienced years of self-loathing, internalizing the shame of being perceived as spaced-out, lazy, and not living up to their potential. Ellen Littman, Ph.D., a clinical psychologist, researcher, and co-author of *Understanding Girls With ADHD*, has studied adults and teens with the disorder for more than 30 years. She says women with undiagnosed ADHD may experience anxiety and depression at a higher rate because of the constant overcompensating they’re doing to keep up with gender norms.



The pressure on women to juggle all the things seamlessly—

family, work, social life—can cause a tremendous amount of stress for anyone, but particularly those who struggle on a day-to-day basis with things like attention, memory, decision-making, organization, and emotion regulation.

So it’s no wonder that adults with ADHD are also more likely to experience anxiety, depression, and substance-use disorders, among other related problems.

“Anxious about being judged an impostor, they are consumed with shame,” says Dr. Littman. “They’re demoralized by their inability to conform, they compare themselves harshly to their peers, and they often isolate themselves.”

Factor in the worst pandemic most of us have experienced in our lifetimes and that anxiety can be unbearable. Dr. Littman says that since the pandemic began, she’s been “absolutely inundated” with people wanting to be evaluated, which psychologists can now do via telehealth.

“The pandemic has amplified all ADHD challenges to unprecedented levels,” says Dr. Littman. “When women are robbed of routines that provide a structure for them, which is really essential to their functioning, they’re reporting much more anxiety, depression, and self-doubt.”

Everyone benefits from the predictability and organization that structure provides, but when you have ADHD and struggle with self-regulation and controlling impulsivity, those external structures are even more critical, explains Dr. Littman. Routines typically help people with ADHD to be consistent and remind them of expectations and consequences.

So now, Dr. Littman says, her patients report being more overwhelmed and frantic than ever. Their family members, who are suddenly around all the time, are newly privy to the problems most of these women are trying to hide, which is how their brains work differently. One way of looking at how the ADHD brain functions is an “interest-based nervous system,” which often makes it extremely difficult for people with ADHD to do things that don’t interest them. “Women have told me that their [male] partners have shamed them by asking, ‘What do you do all day?’ and wonder why they can’t find the time to prepare dinner,” says Dr. Littman.

Meetings are another problem, which Zoom isn’t helping. When people with neurotypical brains are understimulated, they can often still motivate themselves to power through their meetings and remain engaged, says Dr. Littman. But this typically isn’t the case for people with ADHD, who, according to Dr. Littman, “will disengage and start scanning the environment for a higher-stimulation distraction.”

For some, the pandemic may serve as a tipping point that makes ADHD symptoms no longer avoidable or manageable without help. Sari Solden, L.M.F.T., psychotherapist and co-author of *A Radical Guide for Women With ADHD*, explains that suddenly juggling *everything* at home can cause an overload of executive functioning difficulties—particularly when it comes to things like compartmentalizing and prioritizing, some of the main challenges for people with ADHD.

Solden describes the role of executive function as similar to an orchestra conductor's. "Executive functioning is orchestrating and coordinating and making decisions seamlessly," she says. Krista Broda, a 35-year-old mom of two young boys in the Canadian city of Regina, says she realized she had ADHD in March 2020, shortly after her province went into lockdown. Being stuck at home in those early weeks amplified some of things Broda already struggled with: disorganization, irritability, and an inability to sit still. "The traits I consider to be my biggest flaws were spiraling to a point that I felt they were no longer manageable," she wrote in an essay for the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation.

Without the routine of her job as an educational assistant in a primary school and managing the busy social lives of an 8- and 5-year-old, Broda tells SELF, "I was completely lost. I had three or four commitments in March, drive-by birthday parties, and I missed all of them." Then, a friend who had been recently diagnosed posted an article about adult ADHD on Facebook. "I read it and every word popped out at me, and I thought maybe this was something I should look into."

When Broda saw a psychologist for a diagnosis, the first question he asked her was how many speeding tickets she gets, which was regularly. "He said that's a big indication of inattentiveness. You know the cameras are there. You know they're going to be taking pictures, but you just blow right past them."

If you suspect you have ADHD, a first step that could be helpful is seeing your family doctor, who may be able to recommend treatment right away. But they can also refer you to a psychologist or psychiatrist for a diagnosis. Treatment for adults with ADHD, similar to with children, may include medication, either with stimulants such as Adderall and Concerta, or non-stimulant options.

A therapist can also help you process the diagnosis. This is especially important because even though many women feel immense relief after learning they have ADHD and how they can finally get help, grief is also common. “They look at it as all those lost years thrown away to feeling incompetent, feeling lazy, feeling stupid,” Terry Matlen, L.M.S.W., a psychotherapist, certified ADHD coach, and author of *The Queen of Distraction*, tells SELF. Therapists can also refer patients to certified ADHD coaches, similar to life coaches, but trained specifically to help people with ADHD address personal needs and goals, whether it’s starting a business, going back to school, or just organizing their life better.

Experts also urge women to advocate for a referral to a health professional who understands gender differences in ADHD and is aware of emerging research on the role of hormones in the disorder. Researchers are investigating how fluctuations of estrogen levels—whether it's around a menstrual cycle or a life stage such as puberty, childbirth, or menopause—may impact ADHD symptoms. If this seems true for you, it's worth bringing up this research with your doctor.



Since being diagnosed, Lewis has felt more positive about the future. “It feels great, honestly. It just validates my struggles,” she says. She’s also started to check out brain-training tools such as Luminosity. Experts sometimes recommend these tools for people with ADHD to help with memory, focus, and executive functioning—all things Lewis scored fairly low on in her diagnostic test.

While the pandemic has been indescribably difficult, for some it has also helpfully highlighted the cracks in our lives that need more care and attention.

“Learning to set boundaries and say no to things and set limits are lessons to take back with you into the world,” says Solden. “It’s working to put yourself in the center of things instead of just scrambling around to meet everybody else's needs.”

Study: Mindfulness Exercises Effectively Reduce Symptoms in Boys with ADHD and ODD

Boys with both ADHD and ODD were less hyperactive and more attentive after attending a multi-week mindfulness training program, according to a new study that finds promise in this treatment as a viable complement or alternative to medication.



Mindfulness-based interventions can effectively reduce some symptoms of comorbid attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and oppositional defiant disorder (ODD) in boys, according to a new study published in the *Journal of Attention Disorders*¹.

The study, conducted by scientists from a cohort of Italian research institutions, found that boys with both diagnoses who underwent mindfulness interventions — ranging from stress-reduction modules to mindful eating exercises — experienced decreased hyperactive behaviors and improvement in focus and attention compared to peers placed on a waitlist for the same treatment.

No prior research had studied the efficacy of mindfulness programs on children with ADHD and ODD, despite the high comorbidity of these conditions and the popularity of mindfulness meditation as a calming therapy for children and adults with ADHD. The promise of mindfulness therapies, which are known to improve emotional regulation skills and decrease aggression, prompted this new research on children with ADHD and ODD, who experience difficulties in these very areas.

Of a participant group of 50 boys aged 8 to 12 with comorbid ADHD and ODD, half comprised the experimental group, which attended nine weekly mindfulness training sessions and worked on areas like awareness, focus, and self-control via in-session and at-home exercises. Activities were kept short in duration to keep the participants motivated, and included sitting and walking meditation, mindful eating, hatha yoga, and body scans. Parents of participants in this group also attended parallel mindfulness programs to further encourage their children to continue the program.

The boys in both groups were recruited from an associated outpatient hospital and were only enrolled in the study if they were not undergoing other ongoing pharmacological or psychosocial treatments, and met other criteria. All participants were tested on several mindfulness, behavioral, and attentional measures prior to the program's commencement and conclusion. Data was collected via child-, parent-, and teacher-completed scales and questionnaires.

The findings show that hyperactive behaviors, assessed via a teacher report, decreased significantly in children in the experimental group compared with those in the waitlist group (effect size of 0.59 versus 0.00, respectively). The boys in the experimental group also showed improved visual sustained attention compared to the control group (effect size of 0.77 and 0.04, respectively). Finally, the boys in the experimental group saw relative gains in psychological flexibility — the ability to stay in the moment and see thoughts and feelings as fleeting and impermanent (0.43 versus 0.09). “Meditation and mindfulness-based activities could help children to be more focused on moment-by-moment experiences and to intentionally direct their attention to what they are doing in the present,” the study reads.

Based on their findings, the researchers noted that a mindfulness interventions could be suitable for children with both ADHD and ODD. Treatment, however, would also need to target aggressive behavioral problems, as the mindfulness training carried out in the study did not result in meaningful changes in aggressive behaviors (effect sizes of 0.10 in the experimental group and 0.09 in the control group).

This study is limited by its small sample size and its restriction to males. Still, the researchers believe that mindfulness interventions could be “promising alternatives” for children with ADHD and ODD who don't respond to medication or who aren't otherwise pursuing pharmacological treatments.



Spring is in the air and spring break is on the horizon. In a normal year, you might be planning a far-flung vacation at an all-inclusive resort. But 2021 is the year of the spring break staycation, so we've pulled together a gold mine of activities for families looking to keep busy during spring break—and beyond—in the Big Apple.

From landmark exhibitions and excursions to our favorite zoos, to everyday fun in our beautiful parks and playgrounds, we've found 34 things to do on a spring break staycation.

A photograph of a cherry blossom branch in the foreground, with a pond and a torii gate in the background. The cherry blossoms are pink and in full bloom. The background features a green pond, a red torii gate, and a dense forest of green trees.

1. Marvel at the
cherry blossoms
at [Brooklyn Botanic
Garden](#)

2. Go on a public art crawl to see [Talking Heads, Electric Dandelions](#), and more in Lower Manhattan.
3. Head uptown to [Riverdale](#) and spend a day overlooking the Hudson River at [Wave Hill](#), a gorgeous 28-acre public garden and culture center with extensive programming for families.
4. Finally, visit the [Statue of Liberty](#) and the [on-site museum](#). The pedestal and crown are closed, but the grounds are open, and the views are stunning.
5. Head to the [Queens Zoo](#) to enjoy the animals, aviary, petting zoo, farm, and more.
6. Get face-to-face with the sharks at the [New York Aquarium's amazing exhibit](#). When you're done, stroll down the [Coney Island boardwalk](#).
7. Bike down Manhattan's West Side bike path from [Inwood](#) to [Battery Park City](#).
8. Get up close and personal with the residents of the [Bronx Zoo](#), or explore the rest of [Bronx Park](#).
9. Ride the [Staten Island Ferry](#), and then get off and explore the neighborhood.
10. Another neighborhood with its own unique transportation: Take the tram to [Roosevelt Island](#).





11. Visit [City Island](#) for a taste of New England's shore towns without the travel.

12. Enjoy the blooms at the [New York Botanical Garden](#) and the polka-dots too: the landmark [Yayoi Kusama exhibition](#) debuts on Saturday, April 10.
13. Check out NYC's only working farm at the [Queens County Farm Museum](#).
14. Enjoy an alfresco meal, no heater required, at one of these [local restaurants with fun outdoor dining setups](#).
15. Still haven't made it to a drive-in movie? The [Skyline Drive-In is going strong](#) on the Greenpoint waterfront.
16. Dance over [Reflect in Domino Park](#).
17. Explore all the family-friendly destinations [Prospect Park](#) has to offer.
18. Find a [new-to-you playground](#) or explore [one of our favorite standbys](#).
19. Walk over the Brooklyn Bridge and wind your way through [Brooklyn Bridge Park](#), with its stunning vistas and multiple playgrounds. Be sure to check out the newest addition, the [Pier 2 Uplands](#).
20. Take a trek to [Riverbank State Park](#), where you'll find lots of recreational activities for kids and families and plenty of sports fields and courts.



21. Go for a hike in [Inwood Hill Park](#) or explore an [underrated NYC park](#).
22. Explore the [hidden areas of Central Park](#).
23. Once the temperature soars—and the sprinklers spring to life—get yourself to the brand new [mega splash pad at the foot of the Unisphere](#).
24. Go birdwatching in the [Central Park Ramble](#) to see if the celebrity snowy owl sticks around for a second season.
25. Keep an eye on Lincoln Center's [Restart Stages, a sprawling outdoor performance venue](#) that opens Wednesday, April 7, bringing live performances back to the arts complex.
26. Our list of [family-friendly openings we can't wait for](#) features several possible spring debuts, including the [floating park, Little Island](#), and [The Battery Playscape](#).
27. Visit [the Brooklyn Museum](#), and see the larger-than-life [KAWS: What Party exhibition](#).
28. Board the ferry for Jersey and explore [Liberty State Park](#) before venturing to one of our favorite [Northern New Jersey museums](#): the [Liberty Science Center](#).
29. Climb the walls at [The Cliffs at Harlem](#), NYC's newest and largest bouldering gym, or check out one of these other [family-friendly rock-climbing spots](#).
30. Beat a bad-weather day with a trip to [one of these indoor play spaces open now](#), or splurge on a [private play date](#) at one of these cool spots.
31. Missing museums? Many have reopened and are offering timed-entry tickets. Check out our [Guide to Kid-Friendly Museums](#) for our top picks and details on how to [score FREE admission](#).
32. Go for a strike at one of these [family-friendly bowling alleys](#) for NYC kids.
33. Can't wait for summer's [Van Gogh exhibit](#)? There's a cool, immersive art exhibit open now at the [family-friendly Chelsea Market](#). Visit [ARTECHOUSE](#) and its current show, [Geometric Properties](#).
34. May brings the return of the [Macy's Flower Show](#), with a "Give. Love. Bloom." theme in 2021.

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Coalition for the
Homeless:
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Drug and Alcohol
Hotline:
800-622-2255

Food and Hunger
Hotline:
866-888-8777

Homeless Services
Hotline:
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Rape Crisis Hotline:
212-227-3000

National Child
Abuse Hotline:
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National Teen
Dating Abuse
Helpline: 1-866-
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LGBTQ Youth:
1-866-488-7386

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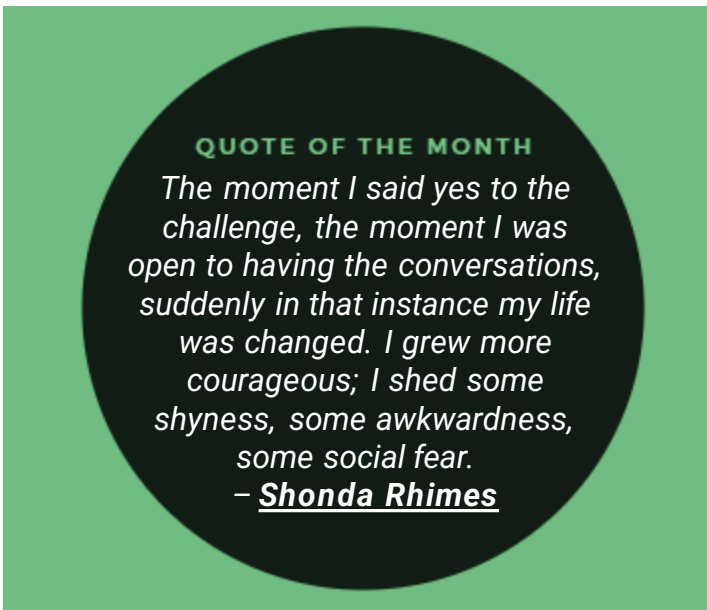


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