

Sunhealth



Edited by LIZZIE PARRY
My team:
Vanessa Chalmers
Sam Blanchard
Katrina Turrill
Emily Stearn
Eliza Loukou
Molly Bowcott

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Your health questions answered
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By CLARE O'REILLY

WHEN Lucy Lambert took her 11-year-old son to an appointment about his ADHD, she was focused on his wellbeing only.

What she didn't expect was to leave feeling shocked that she, too, most likely had the condition.

It was the first time Lucy had been told she was fidgety and interrupted a lot.

While this alone is not indicative of ADHD, she went and did her own research.

"The more I did, the more certain I was that I might have it," she tells Sun Health. She then got a private diagnosis in July 2025, due to lengthy NHS waiting lists.

Most people get a diagnosis of ADHD, a type of neurodivergence, as a child, like Lucy's son. As awareness of the condition has boomed in recent years, a backlog of people – predominantly women – are finding out they fit the criteria, having lived half their lives unaware.

Mum-of-three Lucy, 47, had assumed she was going through perimenopause when she began feeling like she "couldn't cope".

It's a phenomenon that is growing, according to Dr Helen Wall, GP at the Oaks Family Practice in Bolton, who runs a menopause clinic.

She tells Sun Health: "I'm increasingly seeing women, some with known neurodivergence, others undiagnosed, who begin to struggle during periods of hormonal change."

"What I observe is a kind of 'unravelling', particularly in executive function and emotional regulation. Often, this is linked to ADHD that has gone undiagnosed."

Fobbed off

Lucy, from Harpenden, Herts, says: "I was in perimenopause and suffered burnout a lot. The overwhelm was massive, but I just thought everyone else dealt with it better than me."

"I simply couldn't cope with the capacity of things I'd spent decades juggling pretty easily."

At the same time, the former teacher was preparing her son Oliver for an ADHD diagnosis, which came in 2022.

"Oliver (now 13) found school hard because, unlike me, he wasn't suffering in silence," says Lucy. "I've always been really close to him and I 'get' him in a way others don't."

"When we were in an appointment with his consultant in 2024, I mentioned the fact that it can be hereditary. I meant it could be my husband, Toby, 49, that had it but the consultant asked if I'd thought about being diagnosed."

"I remember her saying I fidgeted and interrupted a lot – both ADHD symptoms – and while I wasn't offended, I remember being a bit shocked by her comments."

"My social media began showing me so much about it."

It was in perimenopause and while I didn't connect the two for a while, I was starting to struggle more

MUM HAD THOUGHT SHE WAS JUST GOING THROUGH PERIMENOPAUSE

I was relieved to get my son's ADHD diagnosed at last...and then a doctor told me that I had it too

in my forties than I had in any other decade."

ADHD symptoms vary, but generally fall under forgetfulness, disorganisation, difficulty focusing, restlessness and impulsive decision-making.

Some 2.5million people in England are estimated to have it.

Dr Wall, author of new book *Menopause And ADHD: How To Navigate Hormone Flux And Neurodivergence*, says:

"Women in the

perimenopausal age group and beyond have been missed, misdiagnosed, dismissed and often fobbed off."

Men are usually diagnosed as kids, but for women, diagnosis in their 30s or 40s is far more common.

Dr Wall adds: "ADHD has traditionally been associated with hyperactivity, the stereotypical disruptive boy in the classroom."

"But women and girls often present differently."

"They may have inattentive symptoms and internal restlessness rather than outward hyperactivity. This can look like difficulties with focus, organisation, planning and processing, alongside a constant 'busy' or restless mind."

It may present as daydreaming, perfectionism and being

chatty. Dr Ward explains: "That internal hyperactivity is often misinterpreted as anxiety."

And later in life, it may be misattributed to personality, stress or depression, she adds.

Because girls can also get good grades – Lucy secured a Master's degree – teachers assume they are fine.

But quietly, they are burning mental energy just to keep up. Lucy says: "I did well at school and university, but I found it difficult and I felt like I could have done better."

"I had a great career as a teacher, but where my colleagues could sit and mark the students' books for hours, I would only be able to do a little bit at a time before I would have to get up and move around or take a break because I found the focusing tough."

ADHD is driven by insufficient dopamine (a chemical messenger linked to focus, motivation, impulse control, sleep and learning) in the brain.

Women with ADHD often report that hormonal fluctuations – not experienced by men – can have a big effect on their ADHD symptoms.

Not all doom

Symptoms may be worse when oestrogen is low, during the luteal phase of the menstrual cycle (which occurs right after ovulation and before a period).

During perimenopause, oestrogen levels fluctuate before falling to a low at menopause.

It means symptoms that may have been well managed before suddenly come to the surface.

While Lucy quit teaching in 2021 and now runs a tuition

consultancy, she says so much about her life has made sense since her diagnosis.

She isn't medicated at the moment, but is planning to start soon. In some women, hormone replacement therapy (HRT), the most effective treatment for menopause symptoms, can make ADHD manageable again.

"It was both a surprise and a relief to know it was ADHD," Lucy says. "On one hand, I wish I'd had a diagnosis way earlier in my life. On the other hand, I masked so successfully."

"It was only in perimenopause that hormone fluctuations made the masking impossible and the burnout very real."

Dr Wall says: "Girls and women are often very good at masking from a young age. They learn to cover up their difficulties. When they're trying to

function in systems like education, work and relationships that aren't designed for that difference, it can be very challenging."

It's not all doom and gloom, though. An ADHD brain is deficient in dopamine, which makes boring tasks harder to manage. But if dopamine levels are stimulated "through interest, urgency or passion, ADHD brains can perform exceptionally well", says Dr Wall.

"This means a person with ADHD is often creative, passionate and a good problem-solver," Dr Wall adds: "I don't particularly like the term 'attention deficit hyperactivity disorder', because it frames things negatively."

"People with ADHD don't necessarily have a deficit of attention. In fact, many can hyperfocus extremely well, especially

Do YOU have ADHD?

BELOW is a list of the core symptoms of ADHD, broken into two key areas – inattention and hyperactivity/impulsivity.

The Royal College Of Psychiatrists says for someone to be diagnosed with ADHD, these symptoms need to cause significant difficulties in at least two areas of daily life, such as home, education or employment, relationships and housing.

INATTENTION

- Lack of attention to detail
- Struggling to focus on tasks or activities
- Struggling to listen when spoken to directly
- Not following instructions, and failing to finish work, chores or other duties
- Trouble organising tasks and activities
- Avoiding or disliking tasks that require mental effort over a long period of time, such as schoolwork, homework or housework
- Losing important things such as school materials, pencils, books, tools, wallet, keys, paperwork, glasses and phone
- Getting easily distracted
- Being forgetful
- Making mistakes at school or work, or in other activities

HYPERACTIVITY & IMPULSIVITY

- Fidgeting or tapping hands or feet, squirming in seat
- Leaving your seat in situations when remaining seated is expected
- Feeling restless and having a lot of energy
- Difficulties playing or taking part in leisure activities quietly
- Excessive talking
- Blurting out an answer before a question has been completed
- Finding it a struggle to wait your turn
- Intruding on others, interrupting

"I'd have to get up and move around or take a break because I found focusing tough"
– LUCY LAMBERT

HEALTH CHECK



Look after your heart in the heat

WITH a hot summer forecast and temperatures expected to rise this week, do consider your heart. It has to work harder in the heat to keep you cool.

DR CHUN TANG, of Pall Mall Medical, says: "Hot weather makes your body work harder. That strain can also dehydrate you and upset blood pressure."

Extreme heat has been shown to increase the risk of cardiovascular-related deaths by 11.7 per cent, with the risk higher for those aged 65 and over. Sometimes, the effects of heat can mirror symptoms of heart conditions, making them easy to confuse.

Here are some warning signs you should never ignore . . .

SWOLLEN ANKLES

WHEN the heat causes your feet, ankles and legs to swell, it is usually harmless. But Dr Tang says it can be a sign that fluid is being held in the body.

To reduce the swelling, rest with your legs raised, sip water and avoid too much salt. But get checked if swelling comes with breathlessness, chest pain or a sudden weight gain.

SHORT OF BREATH

THE heat may make you feel a bit more breathless if you're exercising, as well as sweaty and thirsty. But shortness of breath can be a sign that your heart is struggling.

Dr Tang says: "Stop activity, move somewhere cool, sip water and seek medical help if it doesn't settle or happens with chest pain or dizziness."

DIZZINESS

YOU may be dehydrated if a bit woozy in the heat. But lightheadedness can also be a sign that blood pressure is low, or your heart is not pumping enough blood to your brain, says Dr Tang.

Resting and hydrating usually helps, but if you feel confused, breathless or experience chest pain, seek medical help.

CHEST PAIN

ANY pain, tightness or pressure in your chest should never be ignored. "While heat can exacerbate symptoms, this could be a sign of an underlying heart issue," says Dr Tang.

If the pain spreads to your arms or your neck, jaw, back or stomach and you feel sick or lightheaded, it may be a heart attack, so call 999.

EXTREME FATIGUE

MANY of us have experienced fatigue after a day in the sun. It could be heat exhaustion, which can be treated by going somewhere cool and drinking some water. But fatigue, nausea, weakness and cold sweats can also be signs of a heart attack. If you find that your symptoms do not quickly improve, always be sure to call 999.

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SUPPORT... mum and son, posed by models