

U N M A S K E D

The Midlife Unmasking Guide

*on hormones, ADHD, and what is
really happening after 40.*



KNOWLEDGE | VALIDATION | EMPOWERMENT

BEFORE YOU START

What this is — and what it isn't

This isn't a menopause guide. There are plenty of those, written by doctors who never mention ADHD. And it isn't an ADHD guide either — written by experts who don't mention oestrogen.

This is the missing piece in the middle. The guide for the woman whose ADHD got louder when her hormones got quieter — and who can't find anywhere that explains why.

You may have been diagnosed last week. You may still be on the waiting list. You may suspect ADHD but no one has confirmed it. None of that matters here. If your brain is harder to live with now than it was at 30, this is for you.

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

Read it in one sitting if you can. Then come back to the chapter that hit hardest. The point isn't to memorise it — it's to feel less alone in the part that's confusing you most right now.

CONTENTS

The seven chapters

- 01 Why it's hitting now

- 02 You're not getting worse. You're getting visible.

- 03 The biology — in plain English

- 04 What's actually changing

- 05 The emotional fallout — relief, grief, rage

- 06 What helps

- 07 Who you are now

01

CHAPTER 1

Why it's hitting now

If this is hitting harder than it used to, it isn't your imagination. And it isn't because you've stopped trying.

A 2025 ADDitude survey of more than 1,500 women found that **94% said their ADHD symptoms got worse in perimenopause and menopause**. Ninety-four percent. That isn't a coincidence. That's a pattern.

Most women notice it somewhere between 38 and 52. The things that used to work stop working. The systems you held together for decades start slipping. You forget conversations. You walk into rooms and can't remember why. You lose words mid-sentence. You feel behind on everything, all the time.

And the worst part: no one tells you why. You ask your GP and she runs thyroid bloods. You ask your friends and they say it's "just menopause." You ask yourself and the answer that surfaces is the cruel old one. *You've always been a bit useless. Now it's catching up.*

THE REFRAME

You haven't changed. Your scaffolding has. The systems that held you together for thirty years — oestrogen, willpower, masking, caffeine, anxiety — have started to let go. The ADHD underneath was always there. It's just visible now.

02

CHAPTER 2

You're not getting worse. You're getting visible.

Here is the sentence that changes everything: **you're not getting worse. You're getting visible.**

For most women diagnosed late, ADHD was always there. You just developed extraordinary ways to cover it. You over-prepared. You triple-checked. You ran on adrenaline. You said yes when you should have said no. You stayed awake fixing what you should have left alone. You called it being responsible. You called it being a perfectionist. You called it being “just how I am.”

It was masking. And masking is exhausting work powered by hormones that, in your 40s and 50s, start to leave.

When the masking collapses, what people see — including you — isn't a brain getting worse. It's the brain you were always living with, finally uncovered. That's the masking collapse. That's the unmasking.

THE REFRAME

You weren't fine before. You were performing fine. And performance has an expiry date that no one warned you about.

03

CHAPTER 3

The biology — in plain English

This is the bit that gets explained badly almost everywhere. Here it is in plain English.

ADHD brains are short on a chemical called dopamine. Dopamine is what helps you start, focus, finish, feel motivated, feel rewarded, feel okay. It's what makes a brain feel like it's working.

Oestrogen helps dopamine work. Oestrogen is, in effect, the fuel that an ADHD brain has been borrowing from for decades to function at all.

In perimenopause, oestrogen starts to drop. Not steadily — chaotically. Some days you have more. Some days you have almost none. Your dopamine drops with it. Your ADHD, which was already running on less, starts running on much, much less.

At the same time, life rarely gets quieter at this age. Teenagers. Ageing parents. Career. Relationship. Health. **Less fuel. More demands.** That's the storm.

THE REFRAME

This isn't a character flaw. It's a fuel problem. You're not asking too little of yourself. You're running an ADHD brain on a hormone system that's changing the rules.

04

CHAPTER 4

What's actually changing

Some of this you'll recognise immediately. Some of it you'll only recognise once it's named.

WORKING MEMORY

You walk into a room. You don't know why. You read a sentence three times. You hold the thread of a conversation, lose it for a second, and can't find your way back in. This isn't dementia. It's ADHD working memory under hormonal stress.

TASK INITIATION

Starting things used to be the part you could push through. Now there's a freeze that wasn't there before. You want to do the thing. You can't make your body move toward it. The dopamine isn't there to push you in.

EMOTIONAL REGULATION

Reactions feel bigger. Comments land harder. A small slight becomes a 48-hour internal review. This isn't you being dramatic. This is rejection sensitive dysphoria, unmasked by a nervous system that has fewer buffers than it used to.

SLEEP

The 2am brain. The list that grows after the lights go out. The body tired and the mind sprinting. Oestrogen also helps regulate sleep, and an ADHD brain without it loses one of its few reliable shut-down switches.

THE REFRAME

Functioning is not the same as fine. You may still be functioning. That doesn't mean nothing is wrong. The cost of the functioning has changed.

05

CHAPTER 5

The emotional fallout — relief, grief, rage

If you're recently diagnosed — or recognising yourself for the first time — you may be carrying three feelings at once. All of them are valid. None of them is in the right order.

RELIEF

There's a name for this. There's a reason. You aren't broken. The thing you have been fighting your whole life is real and it has a shape. Relief is allowed to be the loudest feeling for a while.

GRIEF

Grief comes when you look back. At school reports that called you lazy. At jobs you nearly held together. At relationships that ended because no one knew you were drowning. Grief for the woman who didn't know is real grief, and you're allowed to mourn her.

RAGE

Rage is fair. At the GPs who missed it. At the teachers who told you to try harder. At the systems that diagnose boys at six and women at forty-six. Don't bury this one. It's often the engine that moves you out of self-blame.

THE REFRAME

You don't have to choose one feeling. You can have all of them. They aren't in conflict. They're evidence that you finally have the full picture.

06

CHAPTER 6

What helps

There is no single fix. There is a pattern. Tiny things, used consistently, that give the system fewer holes to fall through.

STRUCTURE OVER WILLPOWER

Willpower runs on hormones you no longer have a steady supply of. Structure doesn't. The Daily Containment System inside Unmasked is built for this exact moment.

TALK TO YOUR GP — PROPERLY

If you suspect ADHD, ask for an assessment with specific examples. If you're in perimenopause or menopause, ask about HRT — many women see ADHD symptoms ease when oestrogen is replaced. Use The GP Script if you're not sure what to say.

REDUCE INPUTS

Less is the medicine. Less noise. Less scrolling. Less commitment. An ADHD brain running on less fuel does not need more challenges. It needs fewer demands.

PROTECT SLEEP

Sleep is the single most undervalued intervention for an unmasked midlife brain. Use Can't Switch Off — the 10-minute night reset — before bed for a week and see what changes.

THE REFRAME

Resting isn't weakness. It's maintenance. Your brain has been running on borrowed fuel for decades. It is allowed to refuel.

07

CHAPTER 7

Who you are now

The hardest part of midlife unmasking is the identity question that comes after.

If the version of you that everyone has met for thirty years was the masked version — who are you now? If the productivity, the patience, the over-functioning was the costume — what's underneath?

The answer is gentler than you'd expect. You are not a different person. You are the same person, with new information about how she works. You don't have to dismantle your life. You only have to stop running it on a fuel system that no longer exists.

Some things will fall away. Some friendships. Some commitments. Some versions of yes. That isn't loss. That's alignment. The life that fits an unmasked brain is smaller, slower, kinder than the one you've been performing.

You weren't lazy. You weren't broken. You were a woman with ADHD, running for decades on a system that was always going to expire. The expiry isn't failure. It's the start of doing it right.

THE REFRAME

You're not falling apart. You're being uncovered. And the woman underneath has been waiting a long time to be met.

IF THIS HELPED

Where to go next inside Unmasked

This guide names the why. The rest of **Unmasked — ADHD in Perimenopause and Menopause** gives you the how:

- **The Daily Containment System** — the daily structure built for a brain that won't switch off.
- **The 3 Non-Negotiables Planner** — the day, the week, the month, on three things at a time.
- **The Brain Dump Method** — the 6-box thought sort for an overloaded mind.
- **Can't Switch Off** — the 10-minute night reset.
- **Emergency Reset Cards** — seven cards for the moments you can't think straight.
- **The GP Script** — what to say to get diagnosed, and what to say if you're dismissed.
- **The Late Diagnosis Letter** — on grief, what changes, and what doesn't.

There's no rush. Read one piece at a time. Build the system slowly. Tiny works. Tiny is the whole point.

— *ADHD in Women*

adhdinwomen.uk · hello@adhdinwomen.uk

IMPORTANT

This guide is educational, not medical advice

Nothing in this guide constitutes medical diagnosis or treatment. The Midlife Unmasking Guide is information shared from lived experience and current public research on ADHD in women — it is not a substitute for clinical support. If you suspect ADHD, want to discuss HRT, or are struggling with your mental health, please speak with a qualified professional. If you are in crisis in the UK, you can contact Samaritans at **116 123** (free, 24/7).

© 2026 ADHD in Women · adhdinwomen.uk · All rights reserved