

ADHD in Females

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Grace is a second grader. She sits quietly with her hand folded in front of her and watches tv. She sees Dumbo and thinks of the stuffed elephant on her bed. She remembers her brother winning it for her at a carnival, where she got to ride a pony and eat cotton candy. A few minutes pass, and Grace has no idea what is happening around her or on the cartoon. She is not worried, because there really isn't a time that her mind is not wandering.

Grace is a well mannered little girl, but suffers from Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). Like most girls with ADHD, she is not physically hyperactive like the common misconception of people with ADHD. She represents a quarter of the undiagnosed cases of ADHD in females [\(1\)](#). According to the site "What is ADHD..." to be diagnosed as ADHD, a person must fit at least six of the following hyperactive/ impulsive characteristic:

- 1 - often fidgets with hands or squirms in seat;
- 2 - often leaves seat in classroom or in other situations in which remaining seated is expected;
- 3 - often runs about or climbs excessively in which it is inappropriate (in adolescents and adults, may be limited to subjective feelings of restlessness);
- 4 - often has difficulty playing or engaging in leisure activities quietly;
- 5 - is often "on the go" or often acts as if "driven by a motor" á often talks excessively;
- 6 - often blurts out answers before questions have been completed; á often has difficulty awaiting turn;
- 7 - often interrupts or intrudes on others (e.g. butts into conversations or games)

Hyperactivity and impulsiveness are not both needed to be ADHD. An ADHD individual without hyperactivity is interchangeably referred to as ADD, which most ADHD females are.

Between 3 and 5% of school age children are affected with the disorder. ADHD boys are usually diagnosed at an earlier age because of their excessive hyperactivity, but girls are more difficult to diagnose because most females carry only the mellow ADD characteristics. According to ADDvances [\(2\)](#) there are basically three forms of the disorder. Girls, like Grace, are in the category of "daydreamers" with ADD. They sit quietly in class, and parents and teachers sometimes just pass off Grace as being well behaved, introverted, and perhaps a less than average student. A second type of ADD is commonly called "tomboys" with ADD/ADHD. These girls are hyperactive and tend to engage in more physical activities such as sports, exploring, and are always on the run. Unlike most males with ADHD, girls are usually more cooperative at

home but are never satisfied with themselves, and they tend to work hard to please others. The third category of ADD is referred to as the "Chatty Kathy" syndrome, which is simply a combination of hyperactivity and attention deficit, but not necessarily considered "tomboy." These girls are excited, frequently jump from topic to topic, have such problems as discussing a movie plot, interrupt themselves and others, have a difficult time organizing their thoughts, are overreactive, and often develop a "silly" personality (2). The exact cause of the disorder is unknown. Researchers have noticed defects at the dopamine neurotransmitter sites in ADHD patients. In non-ADHD people, the right cerebral hemisphere is slightly larger than the left, but in the ADHD patient the brain appears unusually symmetric (3).

Pet Scan of ADHD vs. non-ADHD brains shows the amount of activity in the brains of an ADHD patient and non-ADHD person. The brain on the right shows little activity compared to the purple regions of activity in the brain on the left. Once, researchers assumed that ADHD was due to an overly active brain, but the PET scan shows that there is actually much less activity in an ADHD brain. This means that an ADHD's brain does not have enough mental activity to sort thoughts and maintain concentration (4). Recent studies have shown that ADHD is a genetically linked recessive gene. MRIs show that the frontal lobe and basal ganglia in ADHD patients are reduced about 10% in size compared to non-ADHD children (5).

The right side of the brain the prefrontal cortex, caudate nucleus, and globus pallidus are about 5.2% smaller in ADHD patients than non-ADHD people. Researchers describe ADHD:

"If the prefrontal cortex is the steering wheel, the caudate and globus are the accelerator and brakes," explained Castellanos. "And it's this braking or inhibitory function that is likely impaired in ADHD. ADHD is thought to be rooted in an inability to inhibit thoughts. Finding smaller right hemisphere brain structures responsible for such "executive" functions strengthens support for this hypothesis" (3).

There are a variety of brain stimulating drugs used in the treatment of ADHD. The most common being Ritalin, Adderall, Dexedrine, and Cylert. The exact mechanism of the drugs are not known, but there are shown to be effective on stimulating the dopamine pathways in the brain (1). The most common, Ritalin, acts as a reuptake blocker.

About 80% of ADHD children are affected by the disorder throughout their adulthood, as well. An unbalanced checkbook, forgotten appointment, disorganized house are the symptoms seen in adults. Statistically, females represent only a quarter of ADHD cases (1) because of the difficulty in recognizing ADHD or ADD in girls. Diagnosing ADHD in females is difficult, because it is usually confused with depression or stress (6).

. Often an untreated woman is seen as messy, irresponsible, impulsive, constantly overwhelmed, and even lazy

[\(2\)](#)

. A woman's disorganization does not have to be necessarily visible, she could feel very unsituated in her mind, instead. In females ADHD is usually diagnosed when entering college or the work place. Her life becomes more complex and stressed, and the signs of the disease are more apparent. The frustration of having ADHD is often worse than the actual effects of the disease. With treatment, rehabilitation, and time an ADHD sufferer can lead a normal life.

WWW Sources

- 1) [What is ADHD?: A General Overview](#) , An extensive and informative site about living with and diagnosing ADHD.

- 2) ADDvances in Research on Women with ADD, An interview with Sari Solden, M.S. .

- 3) [Subtle Brain Circuit Abnormalities Confirmed In ADHD](#) .

- 4) Health- Center.com Information center on various diseases. .

- 5) [The Disability Named ADD](#) A webstie sponsored by C.H.A.D.D. .

- 6) Feeling overwhelmed, disorganized, scattered? For women with ADD. .

- 7) Pet Scan of ADHD vs. non-ADHD brains .