



ADHD Women Unite – Session Summary

Topic: The Physical and Mental Health Costs of ADHD

Facilitator: Katherine Irvine

Format: Online peer support session via Microsoft Teams

Approximate Attendance: 9 participants

Key Themes: Burnout, physical health, emotional regulation, nervous system awareness, food and dopamine, chronic stress, rejection sensitivity, people-pleasing

Overview

This ADHD Women Unite session explored the often-hidden physical and mental health costs of ADHD.

Participants reflected on how ADHD affects far more than concentration and organisation. Women shared experiences of recurring health issues, emotional overwhelm, burnout, injuries, disrupted eating patterns, chronic stress, relationship challenges, and the long-term impact of living with undiagnosed ADHD.

The discussion highlighted the complex relationship between physical health, mental wellbeing, emotional regulation, and everyday functioning. Women explored how difficulties recognising bodily needs, chronic hyperfocus, people-pleasing, rejection sensitivity, and burnout can contribute to significant health consequences over time.

The session combined lived experience, peer support, and reflective discussion, helping participants recognise that many of their struggles are shared by others.

1. The Hidden Physical Health Costs of ADHD

The session opened with discussion around the physical impact of ADHD, particularly the ways in which women often ignore or override their body's signals.

Participants described:

- Forgetting to eat or drink for extended periods
- Delaying trips to the toilet due to hyperfocus
- Recurring urinary tract infections (UTIs)
- Low blood sugar episodes
- Dehydration
- Exhaustion from constantly pushing through fatigue

Several women recognised that they often know they need food, water or rest but struggle to interrupt whatever task or activity they are focused on.

Discussion highlighted how these behaviours can have serious long-term consequences for physical health.

2. Injuries, Accidents and Body Awareness

Participants reflected on the physical injuries they had experienced as a result of rushing, distraction, or being disconnected from bodily signals.

Experiences included:

- Walking into objects
- Repeated bruising
- Falls and accidents
- Ignoring pain until it became severe
- Pushing through physical limitations

One participant described fainting after failing to recognise the signs of low blood sugar and requiring hospital treatment.

The discussion highlighted how ADHD can affect body awareness and increase the risk of injury.

3. Food, Sugar and Dopamine

The relationship between ADHD, food and dopamine was a significant area of discussion.

Women spoke about:

- Cravings for sugary foods
- Binge eating
- Using food for comfort
- Forgetting to eat until becoming extremely hungry
- Seeking quick sources of energy and stimulation

Participants discussed how sugar often provides a temporary dopamine boost but can contribute to longer-term health problems, including weight gain, dental issues, energy crashes and diabetes.

Several women recognised patterns of moving between extremes of restriction and overconsumption.

4. Burnout and Physical Collapse

Burnout emerged as one of the strongest themes of the evening.

Participants described:

- Working through exhaustion
- Ignoring warning signs from their bodies
- Feeling unable to stop
- Physical illness following prolonged stress
- Needing days or weeks to recover

Several women recognised that they often continue functioning long after their bodies have signalled a need for rest.

Discussion highlighted how burnout frequently manifests as both physical and emotional exhaustion.

5. Emotional Dysregulation and Rage

The group explored how chronic stress and overwhelm can contribute to emotional dysregulation.

Participants discussed:

- Sudden anger and rage
- Emotional outbursts
- Shouting and verbal explosions
- Physical expressions of frustration
- Shame and guilt following emotional reactions

Women reflected on how these responses often occur after prolonged periods of suppressing emotions, supporting others, or attempting to cope with overwhelming circumstances.

The discussion provided reassurance that these experiences are common and often linked to nervous system overload rather than personal failure.

6. People-Pleasing and Self-Neglect

A recurring theme was the tendency to prioritise the needs of others above personal wellbeing.

Participants reflected on:

- Feeling responsible for supporting everyone else
- Difficulty recognising personal needs
- Struggling to say no
- Ignoring signs of exhaustion
- Feeling guilty when focusing on themselves

Several women recognised that years of people-pleasing had contributed directly to burnout and emotional exhaustion.

The group discussed the importance of learning to identify and protect personal needs.

7. Rejection Sensitivity and Lost Opportunities

Women discussed how fear of rejection can influence decision-making and everyday interactions.

Examples included:

- Turning down opportunities prematurely
- Avoiding conversations
- Overthinking messages and communication
- Assuming negative outcomes
- Delaying important decisions

Participants recognised that rejection sensitivity can have emotional, social and financial consequences.

The discussion highlighted the importance of giving oneself time to process situations before responding.

8. The Financial Costs of ADHD

Although not the primary focus of the session, financial impacts emerged repeatedly throughout the discussion.

Participants described:

- Forgotten subscriptions
- Impulsive spending
- Lost income opportunities
- Costs associated with burnout and ill health
- Damage to possessions during periods of overwhelm

The group recognised that ADHD can create a range of hidden financial pressures that are rarely discussed.

9. Late Diagnosis and Lifelong Conditioning

The session concluded with discussion around the difference between ADHD traits and behaviours developed through years of living undiagnosed.

Participants reflected on:

- Internalised criticism
- Shame
- Masking
- People-pleasing
- Difficulty identifying authentic needs

Women discussed how diagnosis often begins a process of re-evaluating long-held beliefs about themselves.

The conversation reinforced the importance of self-compassion and recognising that many behaviours developed as coping mechanisms rather than personal shortcomings.

Emerging Insights

- ADHD can have significant physical health consequences that are often overlooked.
- Difficulties recognising or responding to bodily needs may contribute to health problems such as dehydration, poor nutrition and recurrent infections.
- Burnout is a common experience and often develops gradually through chronic overexertion.
- Emotional dysregulation frequently occurs alongside physical exhaustion and chronic stress.
- Food, sugar and dopamine-seeking behaviours play a significant role in many women's ADHD experiences.
- People-pleasing and self-neglect are common contributors to burnout.
- Rejection sensitivity can affect decision-making, relationships and employment opportunities.
- Many ADHD-related challenges carry hidden financial costs.
- Late diagnosis often prompts women to reconsider lifelong assumptions about themselves and develop greater self-compassion