The Hormone Connection

Estrogen, dopamine and neurodivergent brains across life stages

How estrogen and focus connect



ADHD involves differences in dopamine, so low-estrogen stretches are when people with ADHD tend to report things getting harder (Osianlis et al., 2025).

Across life stages

Monthly cycle

Low estradiol with high progesterone predicted more ADHD symptoms in 32 women tracked daily. Autistic adults describe sensory load rising each cycle.

Roberts 2018; Steward 2018

PMDD

Women with ADHD were over 3× as likely to meet PMDD criteria. Autism estimates range from 14.5% to 92%.

Broughton 2025; Skommer 2025

After birth

57.6% of 85 mothers with ADHD scored in the range for at least mild postpartum depression, against about 15 to 20% generally.

Dorani et al., 2021

Perimenopause

Autistic people describe traits intensifying, and some are first diagnosed then. ADHD studies are still missing.

Moseley 2020; Osianlis 2025

Harder weeks are not a failure of effort. Hormones may be part of the picture.

HOW STRONG IS THE EVIDENCE?

early — established

A 2025 review found only 11 studies on ADHD and sex hormones, most of them small. So far, low-estrogen phases look like the harder ones.

What this can mean day to day

Track first

Two or three cycles of notes can show whether harder weeks line up. PMDD is diagnosed from daily ratings across at least two cycles (APA, 2022).

Bring your notes

Timing helps clinicians tell ADHD, autism, PMDD and mood conditions apart.

Plan lighter days

Fewer demands and more recovery time on the days you know are tough.

Sitting with it

Have you noticed times of the month, or seasons of life, when your brain feels harder to live in?

What shifts first for you: focus, mood, sensory load, energy or sleep?

WORTH KNOWING

Most of this research is with cisgender women; people taking hormones may notice different patterns. If cycle or postpartum mood changes bring thoughts of harming yourself, contact a doctor or crisis line now. In the US, call or text 988.

SOURCES

Osianlis, E. et al. (2025). *Journal of Attention Disorders*. · Roberts, B. A. et al. (2018). *Psychoneuroendocrinology*. · Steward, R. et al. (2018). *J. Autism Dev. Disord.* · Broughton, T. et al. (2025). *British Journal of Psychiatry*. · Skommer, J. & Gunesh, K. (2025). *Frontiers in Global Women's Health*. · Dorani, F. et al. (2021). *Journal of Psychiatric Research*. · Moseley, R. L. et al. (2020). *Autism*. · American Psychiatric Association (2022). *DSM-5-TR*.

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