



“Is it AGE or ADHD? Defining the Difference”

Linda Roggli ([00:00](#)):

Hi, I am Linda Roggli, a professional certified life coach, and usually I work with ADHD women, 40 and better, as I like to call them. But today I want to talk not just about women with or without ADHD, but about aging brains of any gender and whether we can tease out the differences between ADHD and AGE or age. And the question is, does everyone develop ADHD as they get older? Spoiler alert. No, they don't. So let's just first talk about the ADHD brain and how it shows up in everyday life. So, number one, we have trouble concentrating and staying focused unless we're just fascinated by something. We have difficulty paying attention in the first place, especially to monotonous or boring tasks or lectures. Maybe I hope not like this one. Memory is an intermittent friend of ours, especially short term or working memory.

Linda Roggli ([00:57](#)):

Sometimes it's crystal clear and sometimes we wonder, why did I come into this room? ADHD folks are often disorganized with papers and clothing and laundry stuff around the house. Planning and follow through can be really tough for us, which is one reason even reading can be difficult for ADHD folks. We can be very emotional experts, call it emotional dysregulation. I call it intensity and sometimes drama. ADHD folks are often sensitive to a variety of environmental or psychological impacts, like loud noises or itchy fabrics, or the disapproval of other people. ADHD affects communications. Sometimes we have a brain freeze during an argument. We just can't think of what to say until the next day. Our brain just shuts down. We lose things so easily. Keys, shoes, important documents. Some of us are impulsive, buying shiny things that aren't in our budget or saying yes to so many interesting opportunities that we get overwhelmed and then sometimes we get depressed because we can't finish them all.

Linda Roggli ([02:11](#)):

There are a lot more ADHD characteristics, but let's stop there and take a look at quote, normal unquote cognitive aging. Did you know that your brain shrinks as you get older? Oh, wonderful. Huh? It does though. It starts when you're in your thirties and forties and it shrinks even faster when you're older than age 60. Scientists tell us that the areas of the brain that shrink the most are the hippocampus and the prefrontal cortex. Those are important areas for memory and executive function, and both are implicated in ADHD. So what does that mean for our quote, normal aging brain activity? Well, for starters, brain processing speed slows down. So we can't dredge up answers to questions that used to be right there at the

Linda Roggli ([02:58](#)):



Tip of our tongues. Ditto for memory, especially. It's difficult for recalling proper nouns like names. And I'm just wondering, why can't everyone wear a name tag these days? Hmm. We have more trouble remembering recent events and problem solving is more difficult, or at least it's slower and multitasking turns into monotasking. The National Institute's on Aging reports that aging brains also have trouble with attention and concentration. Sound familiar and working memory is impacted. So we have more trouble holding onto and manipulating information that we've heard or learned recently. Some older folks lose the ability to find familiar places they might get lost more easily, although this veers really closely to a condition called mild cognitive impairment, which also dances very closely to the dreaded dementia. I'll tell you more about that in just a minute. Men's and women's brains age differently, and it's all about their hormones for women during perimenopause, which can start in your early thirties, forties, or even as late as fifties estrogen levels go a little berserk.

Linda Roggli ([04:14](#)):

Highest highs, lowest lows, to gradually tapering down to low, low, low estrogen levels at menopause that can cause a cascade of issues that originate in the brain. Memory lapses, short fuse emotions and yes, hot flashes because estrogen affects temperature regulation in the brain. Men do not have the dramatic drop in hormones that women do. Testosterone declines more gradually, but there are consequences. Men have more trouble with fatigue and a higher risk of depression. Cortisol levels can increase with age, which also affects stress, anxiety, and irritability for men. Okay. You can see that there's a lot of overlap between ADHD and normal cognitive aging. So is it ADHD when you forget the name of the street where your friend lives? Or is it just getting older? Well, let's take a look at the differences between normal cognitive aging and ADHD. Sensory issues are unique to ADHD.

Linda Roggli ([05:19](#)):

Cognitive aging does not elicit a sudden urge to throw away all your scratchy wool sweaters or change all the light bulbs to 40 watts. There may be some temporary irritability for women at menopause, but it doesn't reach the level of emotional dysregulation. As seen in many ADHD adults since normal cognitive aging does reduce the number of neurons in the brain. For all of us. Remember brain shrinkage. There could be a chance for some overwhelm by non ADHD folks, but difficulty paying attention is not linked in that case to interest or novelty as it is for ADHD. The real key to differentiating ADHD from normal cognitive aging is longevity of symptoms. For instance, if you could easily balance your checkbook when you were younger, but it takes longer now, you probably do not have an ADHD brain. ADHD brains are often flummoxed by anything to do with numbers or math.

Linda Roggli ([06:23](#)):

Now I have to tell you, this is true for only part of the ADHD community. Other people have trouble with reading or with even writing. Most ADHD adults can look back on their lives and recognize the patterns, like being perpetually late for appointments or screeching up against the deadline for term papers, apologizing for forgetting to pick up the dry cleaning, high anxiety about disappointing other people, hyper-focused for hours on intriguing projects to the point of forgetting to eat or sleep or <laugh> even go to the bathroom. Sure, non ADHD adults sometimes flop onto the ADHD side of the room, but as a



rule, they manage to pay their taxes on time and regularly find their car keys. But what if you have ADHD plus cognitive aging? People often ask me, does ADHD get worse with age? And I have to say yes, because you have the perfect storm of ADHD characteristics matched with an aging brain, shrinkage and slowdown, right?

Linda Roggli ([07:29](#)):

Are ADHD brains more likely to develop dementia or Alzheimer's disease? Well, the jury's still out on that one. Some studies show an ADHD predisposition to mild cognitive impairment. That's MCI, by the way. And it's more prevalent among men than women. And that is across the board, not just for A-D-H-D-M-C-I can transmute into dementia, but not always. And remember, there are many, many different kinds of dementia as well. So how do we hold back the clock on ADHD cognitive decline? The recommendations are the same Old, same old tried but true. So I'll just tick 'em off for you anyway. Number one, get enough sleep. There's a direct correlation between MCI and lack of sleep that's been proven. Get moving. You need some regular exercise. 150 minutes per week is the guideline. But if you can't do that many right now, start with 30 minutes and work up.

Linda Roggli ([08:30](#)):

Eat healthy foods such as the Mediterranean diet or plant-based foods and cut out more of the beef and the cottage cheese and the dairy and the butter and sweets. By the way, get or stay social. Dr. Ned Hallowell calls it vitamin C for vitamin connection. Makes a huge difference in keeping your brain active. Keep learning. That does it too. Especially learning a foreign language really keeps those brain neurons firing. And that's been shown to be a really effective way of really keeping your brain going as well as learning to play a new musical instrument. Manage your health. Don't forget to check your blood pressure. Make sure that it's under control as well as your cholesterol and your weight. And of course, limit alcohol and avoid smoking at all costs. So, hmm, is it ADHD or AGE age? Well, it might be both. And the good news is that you can handle it and live that rich, wonderful life into your old, old, old age. This has been Linda Roggli here at the ADDIVA network. I'm so glad you joined us for this session on ADHD awareness month that I'm sure you're going to enjoy the rest of them as well.