

AuDHD: When Two Systems Live in One Body

A neurodivergent reflection guide for those who don't fit cleanly into one explanation

There Is a Pattern That Doesn't Split Cleanly

There are people who begin exploring Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder and feel a deep sense of recognition. The language of attention, activation, and shifting focus lands in a way that feels familiar, almost relieving. And yet, there are pieces that don't fully fit. The pull toward novelty makes sense, but so does the need for sameness. The cycles of motivation resonate, but so does a desire for predictability that feels more like necessity than preference.

Then there are people who explore Autism Spectrum Disorder and recognize themselves there as well. The sensory world feels vivid, sometimes overwhelming. Social interaction requires effort that others don't seem to notice. There is comfort in patterns, in repetition, in knowing what comes next. And still, something doesn't fully resolve. There is movement where there was expected to be stillness. There is variability where there was expected to be consistency.

This is often the place where people begin to feel lost again.

Because most frameworks ask you to choose.

And this experience does not feel like a choice.

What AuDHD Actually Is

AuDHD is a term often used to describe the co-occurrence of ADHD and autism within the same individual. But describing it that way can miss something essential.

It is not simply the presence of two conditions layered on top of one another.

It is the experience of living within **a system where different regulatory needs are operating at the same time.**

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One part of the system may seek:

- structure
- predictability
- depth
- repetition

Another part may seek:

- novelty
- stimulation
- movement
- flexibility

These are not opposites in conflict.

They are needs that exist together, often without a clear hierarchy.

What This Can Feel Like From the Inside

From the outside, this can look inconsistent.

From the inside, it often feels like a constant negotiation.

You may notice:

- A desire to create routines that feel grounding, followed by difficulty maintaining them over time
- Periods of deep, immersive focus that feel effortless, interrupted by sudden loss of momentum
- Sensory environments that feel overwhelming in one moment and under-stimulating in another
- A need for structure that feels calming, alongside resistance when that structure feels imposed
- Systems that work beautifully for a short time, then quietly stop working without a clear reason

This is often interpreted as lack of follow-through or inconsistency.

But what is actually happening is something more complex.

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The system is trying to meet **multiple regulatory needs that do not always align in timing or intensity.**

Why This Gets Misunderstood

Many people who live in this pattern spend years trying to “get it right.”

They find strategies that work for ADHD, but those strategies may not account for sensory overwhelm or the need for predictability.

They find strategies that support autistic regulation, but those may feel too rigid for a system that also needs movement and variation.

When those strategies stop working, it can feel like personal failure.

But often, the issue is not the strategy.

It is that the strategy was designed for **only one part of the system.**

Without a framework that accounts for both, people are left trying to force coherence where the system itself is more complex.

Questions for Reflection

This is not a diagnostic tool. It is a space to notice patterns.

You might gently explore:

- Do you feel both a pull toward structure and a resistance to maintaining it?
- Do you experience cycles of deep focus followed by sudden disengagement?
- Do you seek stimulation while also becoming easily overwhelmed by it?
- Do routines feel helpful in theory but difficult to sustain in practice?
- Do you find that strategies work temporarily but rarely hold long-term?

There are no right answers here.

Only patterns.

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What Changes When This Is Named

When this experience is understood as **AuDHD**, something often shifts.

Not because everything suddenly becomes simple.

But because the contradiction begins to make sense.

What once felt like inconsistency begins to feel like complexity.

What once felt like failure begins to feel like a system trying to regulate itself in more than one way at once.

And from that place, the question changes.

Not:

Why can't I stay consistent?

But:

What does my system need in this moment?

Working With the System, Not Against It

Living within this pattern often means learning how to hold flexibility inside structure.

It may look like:

- Creating routines that allow for variation rather than rigidity
- Building systems that can be returned to, rather than perfectly maintained
- Paying attention to sensory needs alongside attention and motivation
- Allowing for cycles, rather than expecting linear consistency

There is no single strategy that will resolve everything.

But there can be an approach that **respects the system as it is**.

If This Feels Familiar

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You are not alone in this experience.

And you are not “doing it wrong.”

You may be navigating a system that has been asking you to choose between parts of yourself that were never meant to be separated.

Understanding this does not solve everything overnight.

But it can begin to replace confusion with clarity.

And sometimes, that is the first form of relief.

A Gentle Closing

There is nothing inherently broken in a system that holds multiple needs.

There is only the work of learning how to listen to them.

And over time, learning how to respond.

Not perfectly.

But with enough understanding that the system no longer feels like something you are fighting...

and begins to feel like something you are working with.

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