

ADHD FOUNDATIONS · 1.6

Why ADHD Looks Different in Girls and Women

ADHD in girls and women is one of the most reliably missed clinical pictures in psychiatry. This summary covers what the female presentation tends to look like, why it gets missed, and what a proper assessment covers.

FOR

Women, families and parents

AUDIENCE AGE

All ages

REVIEWED

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PART OF

The NeuroFX resource library

IN SUMMARY

Why ADHD Looks Different in Girls and Women

What the female picture often looks like

- **Often inattentive and quiet.** Daydreamy, drifting, losing things, finding it hard to start tasks and hard to follow through. This is not the disruptive picture that historically triggered school referrals.
- **Significant masking.** Bright, hardworking girls and women often put significant effort into looking organised and calm in public. The version other people see hides most of the difficulty.
- **Anxiety, low mood and eating difficulties are common alongside.** By the time many women reach assessment, they have a long history of being treated for mood symptoms without the underlying ADHD being asked about.

What this looks like in real life

- **Persistent overwhelm with daily admin.** Looking externally capable while struggling with admin, post, paperwork, appointments and the household mental load.
- **Symptoms can shift with hormones.** Often worse in the week before a period when oestrogen drops, and often more pronounced through perimenopause. Many women first reach assessment in their forties or fifties for this reason.
- **Emotional intensity and sensitivity to criticism.** Big feelings, fast triggers, frequent self-criticism. Often framed by others as being too sensitive rather than as part of ADHD.
- **Late recognition is common.** Many women only realise after a child or partner is diagnosed. Relief at finally having a name for the pattern is common; so is some grief about how long it took.

How we can help

- **An assessment built for the female picture.** NeuroFX offers a private adult ADHD assessment for women that covers masking, cycle-related variation, perimenopause, and any co-occurring anxiety, low mood or eating difficulties.
- **Same NICE standard whichever route you choose.** Whether you come to us through the NHS, via Right to Choose in England, or privately, the diagnostic standard follows NICE NG87.
- **Treatment covers more than medication.** A good plan covers understanding the condition, hormonal context, environmental adjustments, support for any co-occurring difficulties, and medication where appropriate.
- **Bring what you have.** Old school reports, parental memories, a few cycles of symptom tracking. Anything that helps us see the pattern across time is useful.

WHEN TO SPEAK TO A PROFESSIONAL

Speak to your GP if the pattern fits across more than one area of life and dates back to childhood. NeuroFX offers private adult ADHD assessment for women from our Bedford clinic. Seek same-day help via 111 (or 999 in an emergency) for any mental health crisis, including eating difficulties in crisis.

SOURCES

Faraone et al. 2021 (Neurosci Biobehav Rev); Hinshaw et al. 2022 (J Child Psychol Psychiatry); Quinn & Madhoo 2014; Roberts et al. 2018; Eng et al. 2024; NICE NG87

NEXT STEPS**Speak to NeuroFX**

Private ADHD and autism assessment for adults and children aged 6 and upwards.
CQC-registered. Bedford Consulting Rooms, 4 Goldington Road, Bedford MK40 3NF.

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