

ADHD FOUNDATIONS · 1.7

Why ADHD Is Frequently Missed in Adults

Adult ADHD is one of the most under-diagnosed conditions in UK psychiatry. This summary covers why it gets missed and what to do if you suspect you are one of the missed adults.

FOR

Adults investigating their own ADHD

AUDIENCE AGE

18+

REVIEWED

17 May 2026

PART OF

The NeuroFX resource library

IN SUMMARY

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Why adult ADHD gets missed

- **The criteria were built around children.** Many of the diagnostic examples still describe school-age presentations. Adult restlessness is often internal rather than visible, so the clinician has to know what to listen for.
- **The inattentive presentation is quiet.** Daydreamy, drifting, lost-in-admin difficulty rarely gets noticed. Disruptive behaviour gets referred. Quiet underperformance does not.
- **Workarounds hold things together for a long time.** Many adults have spent decades inventing their own strategies for getting through. The difficulty often only becomes visible when something changes, such as a new job, having a baby, perimenopause, or a stretch of burnout.

What this looks like in real life

- **Anxiety and depression often take the spotlight first.** These are real and often present alongside ADHD. Treating them as the whole picture leaves the underlying ADHD unaddressed, and the response to treatment is often disappointing because of that.
- **Female presentation is consistently missed.** Girls and women often have the inattentive picture, mask effectively, internalise difficulty, and reach adulthood without ever being asked about ADHD.
- **Educational achievement does not rule it out.** Many adults with ADHD have degrees and professional jobs. They have often done well at a cost that other people do not see.
- **Social media is a prompt for a conversation.** TikTok content can be the first hint that something fits. It is not a clinical answer. The next step is talking to a clinician, not deciding on the basis of a video.

How we can help

- **Start with your GP.** Ask for a referral specifically for adult ADHD assessment. Mention Right to Choose if you are in England and want to explore that route.
- **Consider private assessment if waiting is the barrier.** NeuroFX is a CQC-registered private clinic offering adult ADHD assessment to the same NICE standard as the NHS.
- **Bring developmental history.** Old school reports, parental memories, recollections of how you functioned at twelve. All of this helps the clinical picture make sense.
- **Female-specific assessment is available.** If you are a woman, our women's adult ADHD assessment explicitly covers masking, cycle effects, perimenopause and co-occurring conditions.

WHEN TO SPEAK TO A PROFESSIONAL

Speak to your GP if the pattern is persistent, dates to childhood, and affects daily life. NeuroFX offers private adult ADHD assessment where waiting is a barrier. Seek same-day support via 111 (or 999 in an emergency) for any mental health crisis.

SOURCES

Faraone et al. 2021 (Neurosci Biobehav Rev); Sibley et al. 2016 (Lancet Psychiatry); Asherson et al. 2016 (Lancet Psychiatry); Hinshaw et al. 2022; Faraone et al. 2006; 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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