

ADHD FOUNDATIONS · 1.5

ADHD Prevalence in the UK: How Common Is It Really?

How common is ADHD in the UK, and why diagnosis rates have risen sharply over the past decade. The honest picture from the best available studies, for both children and adults.

FOR

Adults and parents

AUDIENCE AGE

All ages

REVIEWED

17 May 2026

PART OF

The NeuroFX resource library

IN SUMMARY

ADHD Prevalence in the UK: How Common Is It Really?

What the numbers say

- **Children worldwide.** Around 5 to 7 percent of children meet criteria for ADHD. UK estimates fall within this range, with NICE citing roughly 5 percent.
- **Adults worldwide.** Around 2.5 to 5 percent of adults meet criteria, depending on methodology. UK working figures sit at around 3 to 4 percent.
- **True prevalence has been stable for decades.** Recognition has changed. ADHD is being diagnosed more often, especially in adults, but the underlying rate has not increased.

What that means in real life

- **Adult ADHD is common.** It is approximately as common in the UK as moderate or severe depression. If the picture fits, you are not unusual.
- **The rise in diagnoses reflects recognition, not an epidemic.** DSM-5 explicitly recognised that ADHD persists into adulthood. Public awareness has grown. More clinicians are trained to assess. Pathways such as Right to Choose have made assessment more accessible.
- **Some groups are still under-diagnosed.** Women and girls (particularly the inattentive presentation), older adults, and people from minoritised ethnic groups are still diagnosed at lower rates than the data predicts.
- **Population numbers do not answer the personal question.** Whether you personally meet diagnostic criteria is a clinical question that requires a proper assessment. Population statistics cannot answer it on your behalf.

How we can help

- **Start with your GP.** GPs can refer to the NHS or to an NHS-contracted provider under Right to Choose in England. NHS waiting times in many regions are long.
- **Consider a private route if waiting is the barrier.** NeuroFX is a CQC-registered private clinic offering ADHD assessment for adults and for children aged 6 and upwards.
- **Same NICE standard whichever route you choose.** Private or NHS, a good assessment follows NICE NG87: a full clinical interview, developmental history, and information about current functioning.

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 and paediatric ADHD assessment where NHS waiting times are a barrier. Seek same-day support via 111 (or 999 in an emergency) for any mental health crisis.

SOURCES

Polanczyk et al. 2014 (Int J Epidemiol); Song et al. 2021 (J Glob Health); Faraone et al. 2021; APMS 2014; NICE NG87; McKechnie et al. 2023 (BJPsych Open)

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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