

ADHD FOUNDATIONS · 1.4

Is ADHD Genetic? What the Heritability Data Actually Shows

ADHD is one of the most heritable conditions in psychiatry. This summary explains what the 70 to 80 percent heritability figure actually means, why ADHD runs in families, and why environment still matters.

FOR

Adults and parents

AUDIENCE AGE

All ages

REVIEWED

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PART OF

The NeuroFX resource library

IN SUMMARY

Is ADHD Genetic? What the Heritability Data Actually Shows

What the genetics say

- **ADHD heritability is high.** Twin studies consistently put it at around 70 to 80 percent. That is similar to height and well above most psychiatric conditions.
- **Many genes, small effects each.** There is no single ADHD gene. The first genome-wide significant risk loci were identified in 2019, and the picture is still expanding.
- **ADHD shares genetic ground with other conditions.** Autism, depression, anxiety and other conditions overlap genetically with ADHD. This is part of why co-occurring conditions are so common.

What it looks like in families

- **It runs in families.** If one biological parent has ADHD, the chance a child has it is meaningfully higher than the population baseline. If both parents have ADHD, the chance is higher again.
- **'I think I have it too' is a common moment.** Many parents recognise themselves during their child's assessment. It is one of the most common entry routes into adult ADHD diagnosis.
- **Environment matters too.** Prematurity, prenatal alcohol or nicotine exposure, and severe early adversity all have evidence as risk factors. These interact with genetic vulnerability rather than cause ADHD on their own.
- **Some popular explanations are not supported.** Sugar, screen time, parenting style and food additives do not cause ADHD. They can affect how it shows up, but they are not the cause.

How we can help

- **Bring the family history.** If ADHD or other neurodevelopmental conditions run in your family, that information is clinically useful. NICE-aligned assessments ask about it as a matter of course.
- **Parent and child together.** If you are arranging your child's ADHD assessment and recognise yourself in the picture, we can assess you too. Many families find this useful.
- **Treatment changes the trajectory.** Understanding the condition, environmental adjustments, support for any co-occurring difficulties and medication where appropriate all meaningfully change outcomes. Genetic heritability does not mean a fixed outcome.

WHEN TO SPEAK TO A PROFESSIONAL

Speak to your GP if the pattern is persistent, runs in the family and affects daily life. NeuroFX offers private ADHD assessment for adults and for children aged 6 and upwards. Seek same-day support via 111 (or 999 in an emergency) for any mental health crisis.

SOURCES

Faraone et al. 2021 (Neurosci Biobehav Rev); Demontis et al. 2019 (Nat Genet); Faraone & Larsson 2019 (Mol Psychiatry); Thapar & Cooper 2016 (Lancet); NICE NG87

NEXT STEPS**Speak to NeuroFX**

Private ADHD and autism assessment for adults and children aged 6 and upwards.
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