

ADHD FOUNDATIONS · 1.2

The Three ADHD Presentations: Inattentive, Hyperactive, Combined

ADHD comes in three patterns: mostly inattentive, mostly hyperactive and impulsive, or a combination of both. This summary explains each one and how the picture can shift across a lifetime.

FOR

Adults and parents

AUDIENCE AGE

All ages

REVIEWED

17 May 2026

PART OF

The NeuroFX resource library

IN SUMMARY

The Three ADHD Presentations: Inattentive, Hyperactive, Combined

The three presentations

- **Inattentive.** Trouble holding attention on tasks that are not interesting, losing track of details, forgetfulness, and difficulty getting started or following through. This is the presentation most often missed at school.
- **Hyperactive-impulsive.** Fidgeting, restlessness, talking over others, acting before thinking. Easier to spot in children. In adults it often shifts towards an internal sense of restlessness.
- **Combined.** Meaningful difficulty in both clusters at the same time. This is the most common presentation seen in clinic.

What it looks like in real life

- **Inattentive children often drift.** Daydreaming, losing materials, missing instructions, underperforming relative to ability. Teachers often describe them as in their own world. The difficulty often shows up as falling grades at secondary school.
- **Hyperactive-impulsive children are easier to spot.** Movement, blurting, struggling to wait their turn. This is the picture most people associate with ADHD, although it is only one part.
- **Combined adults often look productive but feel chaotic.** Lots of activity, lots of half-finished projects, and a constant sense of being behind on the things that matter.
- **The presentation can shift with age.** Hyperactivity often softens with time while inattention persists. Many adults who were combined as children meet inattentive criteria later in life.
- **Inattentive ADHD is the most missed in girls, women and quieter adults.** It does not cause classroom disruption, so it tends to go unnoticed for years.

How we can help

- **A NICE-aligned assessment looks at the whole picture.** Current symptoms, lifelong pattern, impact at home, school or work, and any co-occurring conditions. NeuroFX assessments cover all of this for adults and for children aged 6 and upwards.
- **The plan matters more than the presentation label.** Treatment is not chosen by presentation alone. A good plan covers understanding, environmental adjustments, support for any co-occurring difficulties, and medication where appropriate.
- **Talk to your GP, or come direct.** Your GP can refer to the NHS or to an NHS-contracted provider under Right to Choose in England. NeuroFX is a CQC-registered private option where waiting is a barrier.

WHEN TO SPEAK TO A PROFESSIONAL

Speak to your GP if the pattern is persistent, shows up in more than one area of life, and is not better explained by something else. Seek same-day help via 111 (or 999 in an emergency) for any mental health crisis. NeuroFX offers private ADHD assessment for adults and for children aged 6 and upwards.

SOURCES

DSM-5-TR; NICE NG87; Faraone et al. 2021 (Neurosci Biobehav Rev); Willcutt 2012 (Neurotherapeutics); ICD-11

NEXT STEPS**Speak to NeuroFX**

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