

ADHD FOUNDATIONS · 1.1

What ADHD Actually Is: A Modern Clinical Explanation

A plain-English explanation of what ADHD actually is, how it shows up in real life, and what to do next if you recognise it in yourself or your child.

FOR

Adults and parents

AUDIENCE AGE

All ages

REVIEWED

16 May 2026

PART OF

The NeuroFX resource library

IN SUMMARY

What ADHD Actually Is: A Modern Clinical Explanation

What ADHD is

- **A brain-based difference, present from early in life.** ADHD is a neurodevelopmental condition. The brain's self-regulation systems work differently from childhood onwards. It is not caused by poor parenting, sugar, screens or a lack of effort.
- **It runs in families.** ADHD is one of the most heritable conditions in psychiatry. Around 7 to 8 in 10 of the variation between people is explained by genetics, so if one family member has ADHD, others often do too.
- **It comes in three patterns.** Mostly inattentive, mostly hyperactive and impulsive, or a combination of both. The pattern can shift across a lifetime. The quieter inattentive picture is the one most often missed.

What it looks like

- **Attention that follows interest.** Long stretches of focus on something interesting, then real difficulty starting tasks that are boring but necessary. This pattern is well documented in the research and reflects how the underlying systems respond to interest and stimulation.
- **Time, planning and follow-through take more effort.** Starting tasks, judging how long things take, prioritising, and getting through admin all take more effort than they seem to for other people.
- **Restlessness, inside or outside.** Children often look fidgety or impulsive. Adults often describe a busy mind that will not switch off, even when the body is still.
- **Emotions that hit harder and faster.** Frustration, overwhelm and sensitivity to rejection can feel disproportionate. The emotional side of ADHD is now well recognised clinically, even though it is not in the formal diagnostic checklist.
- **Often missed in girls, women and quieter adults.** Many people reach adulthood without anyone asking the question, particularly if school grades held up. A late conversation about ADHD is common, not unusual.

How we can help

- **Start with your GP.** Ask for a referral for an ADHD assessment. In England you can request Right to Choose to pick an NHS-contracted provider, which often shortens the wait.
- **Consider a private assessment if waiting is a barrier.** NeuroFX is a CQC-registered private clinic offering ADHD assessment for adults and for children aged 6 and upwards. Diagnosis follows the NICE NG87 standard.
- **Treatment covers more than medication.** A good plan covers understanding the condition, workplace or school adjustments, daily routines, support for any co-occurring anxiety or low mood, and medication if appropriate.
- **We can support medication and shared care.** Where medication is part of the plan, NeuroFX prescribes and titrates carefully, and hands over to your NHS GP under shared care where the local ICB accepts it.

WHEN TO SPEAK TO A PROFESSIONAL

Speak to your GP if these traits are persistent, show up across more than one area of life, and are not better explained by something else. Seek same-day help if you or your child are experiencing thoughts of self-harm or a mental health crisis: call 111, or 999 in an emergency. For a faster route to assessment, NeuroFX offers private ADHD assessment for adults and children aged 6 and upwards.

SOURCES

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

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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