

THE ADULT ADHD ASSESSMENT GUIDE

Chapter 3

Could this be me?

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If you are looking for the signs of ADHD in adults, you are probably weighing your own life against what you have read. That is a reasonable thing to do. This chapter describes how ADHD tends to show up at work, at home and in relationships, why so many adults reached midlife without anyone noticing, and what coping can quietly hide.

Why so many adults were missed

For a long time, ADHD was thought of as something that affected boys who could not sit still. Plenty of people who did not fit that picture grew up without it ever being considered. Quiet, inattentive traits rarely disrupt a classroom, so they were easy to overlook.

Many adults also became very good at coping. They built elaborate systems, worked late to catch up, and leaned hard on deadlines and adrenaline. From the outside this looks like someone managing perfectly well. From the inside it can feel like running twice as fast to stay in the same place.

Masking and the high-functioning trap

Masking is the effort of hiding or compensating for traits so they do not show. It can be so practised that even close family do not see it. The difficulty is that masking works, until it does not. A new job, a baby, a bereavement or simply more demands than usual can tip a finely balanced system over.

Being capable is exactly why some people are slow to seek help. If you have always delivered, it is easy to assume the strain is normal and everyone feels this way. Often, they do not.

	At work	At home	In relationships
Attention and focus	Missing detail in long emails, starting more than you finish.	Half-done jobs around the house, bills forgotten until late.	Drifting off mid-conversation, then feeling guilty about it.
Restlessness	Hard to sit through long meetings, craving variety.	Rarely still, always needing a project on the go.	Getting bored or restless once early excitement fades.
Impulsivity	Speaking before thinking, impulsive decisions or spending.	Buying on a whim, jumping between hobbies.	Saying things you later regret in the heat of a moment.
Time and organisation	Underestimating how long tasks take, last-minute rushes.	Lateness despite good intentions, lost keys and phones.	Forgotten plans and dates read as not caring.
Emotions	Strong reactions to setbacks, sensitivity to criticism.	Quick to overwhelm when too much lands at once.	Feelings that arrive fast and large, then pass.

How the same traits can surface across different parts of adult life.

The quiet cost of coping

When a single trait appears now and then, it means little. We all lose our keys.

What matters is the pattern: traits that have been there since childhood, that show up across several areas of life, and that take a real toll to manage.

That toll is often the part people notice last. Years of compensating can look like tiredness, low mood, or a sense of underachieving against your own potential.

Recognising the pattern underneath can be a quiet relief.

For years I thought I was simply lazy and disorganised, and trying harder was the only answer I knew. Seeing the pattern named was the first time the effort made sense.

Paul Fox, Co-founder of NeuroFX and ADHD UK Ambassador



Recognising yourself is not a diagnosis

If a lot of this sounds familiar, that is worth taking seriously. It is also not, on its own, a diagnosis. Many of these experiences overlap with anxiety, with the after-effects of stress, and with ordinary life under pressure. That is precisely why a careful assessment matters.

The next chapter looks honestly at [why an assessment can be worth it](#), and what a diagnosis can and cannot give you.

Key takeaways

- Many adults were missed because quiet, inattentive traits rarely disrupt a classroom.
- Masking and compensating can hide ADHD for years, until demands outgrow the coping.
- What matters is the pattern: long-standing traits, across several areas of life, that take a real toll.
- Recognising yourself is a good reason to look further, but only an assessment can give an answer.

Common questions

How is ADHD different from just being busy or stressed?

Stress comes and goes with circumstances. ADHD is a persistent pattern that has been present since childhood and shows up across several areas of life, not only when things are hard.

Can you have ADHD and still be successful?

Yes. Many people achieve a great deal while quietly working much harder than those around them to do it. Success does not rule ADHD out, and the strain of coping is often the clue.

What is masking?

Masking is the effort of hiding or compensating for traits so they do not show. It can be so well practised that even close family do not notice, which is part of why diagnosis comes late for so many.

I recognise a lot of this. What should I do next?

Take it seriously, but remember that recognising yourself is not a diagnosis. The next step is to read about your options and, if it feels right, arrange an assessment that can give you a clear answer.

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This guide is general information, not a substitute for individual clinical advice, and it cannot diagnose ADHD or any other condition. If you are concerned about yourself or your child, please speak to your GP or arrange a professional assessment. NeuroFX is a CQC-registered clinic and our guidance follows NICE guideline NG87.