

ADHD at work: A practical guide for employees, managers and colleagues

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ADHD at work: A practical guide for employees, managers and colleagues

This guide is for ADHD employees and the managers or colleagues who work alongside them. It explains how ADHD can show up at work, where to find support, and some practical ways to make work work better for different brains.



Start here

- **I have ADHD or think I might:** Start with [“For ADHD Employees”](#) for diagnosis routes, self-management strategies and workplace support.
- **I manage or work alongside someone with ADHD:** Start with [“For Managers and Colleagues”](#) for practical ways to understand and support them.
- **I want to understand ADHD first:** Read [“Understanding ADHD”](#), then jump to the section that is most useful to you.



ADHD at Work: At a Glance

- ADHD is a neurodivergent profile that manifests in a variety of ways – normally characterised by hyperactivity, impulsivity, and/or inattention.
- Prevalence estimates vary depending on how ADHD is defined and measured. Research suggests persistent adult ADHD affects around 2.5–3% of adults, while estimates based on current traits can be higher.
- If you think you might have ADHD, you can seek diagnosis via the NHS, a private provider or Right to Choose if you live in England and meet the eligibility criteria.
- You do not necessarily need a formal diagnosis to ask for support at work. Adjustments should be based on the barriers someone experiences and what would help.

Understanding ADHD

What is it?

ADHD is a neurodevelopmental condition, medically characterised by traits of hyperactivity, impulsivity and inattention. It's also increasingly understood as a natural variation in how brains work, one that brings real strengths alongside the challenges.

Hyperactivity, impulsivity and inattention are the main domains considered during diagnosis, but ADHD can affect a much wider range of experiences. Executive-function and emotional-regulation differences are increasingly recognised as significant features for many people with ADHD.

- ⚡ **Hyperactivity:** difficulty being still, physically or mentally. This can look like restlessness, fidgeting, difficulty remaining seated, struggling to relax or having a lot of physical energy. Internal hyperactivity can feel like chronic overthinking or difficulty switching off. A common metaphor is “feeling driven by a motor”.
- 🖐️ **Impulsivity:** this is a difference in managing impulses, which can look like hasty decision making, having a higher risk tolerance, quick to start new projects or body focused repetitive behaviours (e.g. biting your nails).
- 🧑💻 **Attention:** this isn't that ADHD folks lack attention, but struggle with controlling what grabs and/or sustains our attention.
- 🧠 **Executive function:** Executive functions are things like time management, organising, and working memory (holding info in your mind as you're using it). These areas can be affected, making things like prioritising, estimating time or following instructions more difficult and effortful.
- ☁️ **Emotional regulation:** ADHD can make emotions feel more intense and harder to regulate, so strong emotions can be quicker to surface and longer to return to baseline, e.g. frustration, stress or excitement.

Research has found that, on average, ADHD brains differ from non-ADHD brains in how they develop, how attention is regulated, and how they use dopamine (a chemical messenger involved in motivation and focus). But these findings vary between studies, and there's no brain scan or blood test that can diagnose ADHD in an individual.

Whilst these are the main areas affected by ADHD, it will never look the same in two people.

Intersectionality plays a significant role - someone's gender, ethnicity, cultural background, age or co-existing health conditions will affect ADHD traits and how they're experienced. Understanding the key contours of ADHD helps make the invisible, visible, however never use them to make assumptions about what it means for someone. Neurotypes tend to overlap, so it's not uncommon for someone to also be dyslexic or autistic.

How prevalent is it?

It's estimated that around 3% of adults have ADHD, though it's hard to know for sure. Figures range from 2.6% for persistent ADHD to 6.8% for people with current symptoms, depending on who's studied and how ADHD is defined and measured.

Diagnoses have risen sharply, but that doesn't necessarily mean more people have ADHD. Greater awareness has helped many adults recognise lifelong patterns that were missed before. More recognition isn't the same as overdiagnosis.

What's the impact?

ADHD can affect work, wellbeing and everyday functioning, particularly when environments create avoidable barriers or people do not have the support they need.

A US analysis estimated that workplace productivity and income losses associated with adult ADHD account for \$87–138 billion each year. Adults with ADHD also experience higher rates of anxiety, depression and substance-use problems at a population level. These are associations, not predictions about any individual ADHDer, and they underline the value of timely support and well-designed work rather than defining ADHD only through deficit.

For ADHD employees

I have ADHD / I think I have ADHD

If you think you have ADHD or you've been diagnosed, here's how to get support.

Getting a Diagnosis

Routes to an ADHD assessment vary across the UK. Common routes include NHS referral and private assessment. In England, eligible patients may also be able to use Right to Choose.

- **NHS:** Speak to your GP about a referral for an NHS assessment; waiting times vary by area and can be long.
- **Right to Choose:** If you live in England and meet the eligibility criteria, you may be able to ask your GP for an NHS-funded referral to an approved provider—see [ADHD UK's guide](#).
- **Private:** You can pay for an assessment with a suitably qualified clinician, but check the full costs and arrangements for medication, follow-up and NHS shared care before proceeding.

The workplace-adjustment and Access to Work information in this guide relates primarily to England, Scotland and Wales. Northern Ireland has separate employment legislation and support arrangements. Diagnosis pathways also vary between UK nations and local areas.

Support with specific challenges

ADHD looks different for everyone, so support should too. The best place to start is with the individual: what gets in the way of doing your best work, what already helps, and what small changes might make work easier.

ADHD, and other neurodivergence, shows up in predictable, repeatable patterns. Understanding those patterns and the impact of them can help inform what support you might need. A helpful tool is the PIN framework to consider ways to adjust your work or ask for support.

Use the PIN Framework

PIN is a simple way to turn what you're noticing into a useful support conversation:

-  **Pattern:** What shows up repeatedly?
-  **Impact:** Where or how does it create friction?
-  **Next:** What could reduce the friction?

You can use it to think through what you might need yourself, or to explain the pattern and its impact when asking a manager or colleague for support.

Some support can be agreed directly with a manager or People/HR team as a [reasonable adjustment](#). If you need additional practical support, equipment or coaching, you may also be eligible for the government's [Access to Work scheme](#). Access to Work does not replace an employer's responsibility to make adjustments, but it may help with support beyond them.

The ideas below are prompts, not a prescriptive shopping list. What is useful will depend on the person, their role and their working environment.

What someone might be experiencing	Support to explore
Easily distracted	· Noise-cancelling headphones or earplugs. · A quieter workspace or agreed focus periods. · Flexibility over where work is completed. · Pink noise, which may offer a small benefit on attention tasks for younger people with ADHD. · Binaural beats, if you find them helpful; evidence is still preliminary. · Focus apps or body-doubling tools. · Clear expectations about availability and response times on instant messages/emails at work.
Restlessness or difficulty staying physically still	· Freedom to stand, move or fidget during meetings. · Movement breaks between tasks. · A standing desk or alternative seating. · Camera-off options where appropriate. · Using a fidget toy/object.
Working-memory differences or difficulty processing lots of information at once	· Written follow-ups after verbal conversations. · Clear instructions, examples and visual aids. · Meeting agendas shared in advance. · Permission to record or transcribe meetings where appropriate, with everyone's knowledge and in line with organisational policy and data-protection requirements. · Breaking information into smaller steps.
Organisation, prioritisation or time-management difficulties	· Regular prioritisation check-ins. · Clear deadlines and an agreed definition of "done". · Task-management or reminder tools. · Larger pieces of work broken into milestones. · ADHD coaching or practical strategy support.
Difficulty switching between tasks or recovering from interruptions	· Protected focus time, in the diary and communicated. · Fewer unnecessary meetings. · Batching similar tasks. · Advance notice of changes where possible. · A short reset period after demanding meetings or interruptions.
Emotional regulation, stress or fluctuating energy	· Clear, specific and timely feedback. · Time to process before responding to difficult information. · Flexibility around breaks, hours or working location where possible. · Agreed ways to flag overwhelm and ask for help. · Support to review workload and competing priorities.

What someone might be experiencing	Support to explore
	· Scheduling demanding work during peak-energy windows.

Many of these are things you can try yourself. Where they require support or adjustment from the employer, this should be discussed, agreed and reviewed rather than treated as a one-off fix. Needs can change over time, particularly when someone's role, workload, health or working environment changes.

Remember, ADHD also comes with significant strengths. Research most consistently points to creativity and original thinking, especially idea generation and finding workarounds. Many people also describe deep focus when something interests them, plus energy, curiosity, empathy and adaptability. These aren't guaranteed or universal, so the aim is to work out which ones are true for you, then get the right adjustments in place so you can use them and do your best work.

For Managers and Colleagues

Supporting people with ADHD

If you want to support a colleague with ADHD, here are some practical ways to help:

- **Learn a little bit about it:** it's a misrepresented and misunderstood neurotype and if you can garner a few key facts you'll be more empathetic towards those who have it. If you've read this, that's a great start!
- **Have open conversations** about it if it comes up, be curious and don't judge. A friendly and empathetic ear does wonders.
- **Ask how it shows up for someone** and how that might affect your working relationship. It takes a lot of effort to 'hide' or 'mask' it, so being given the opportunity to be upfront about it is helpful, and creating space to discuss areas that you can both work with may well improve your relationship and ability to work together productively. See below for some questions to help you.
- **Offer help** with things like organisation, prioritisation and accountability. And if your colleague has systems or tools to support their focus, respect and protect that!
- **Appreciate and celebrate the strengths** that can come with it. 'Deficit' and 'Disorder' are half the words used in ADHD, but people with ADHD may also bring distinctive strengths and unique ways of contributing. Help challenge the deficit model and recognise what your colleague brings to the table.
- If you're worried about saying the wrong thing? Lead with curiosity rather than assumption, and you're much more likely to have a meaningful conversation.

Questions to help unlock support

ADHD can create friction in areas such as working memory, attention, time management, processing information, emotional regulation and the sensory environment. How that shows up, and what helps, will be different for each person. The questions below are prompts to help managers and colleagues move beyond assumptions, understand where the friction sits and identify practical support to try. You do not need to ask them all: choose one or two that feel relevant, ask with genuine curiosity, and give the person time to think. They may not have been asked before or have an immediate answer.

Memory:

- Do visual, numerical or written formats help you remember best?
- Where could technology or other tools reduce the need to rely on memory?
- What information or tasks are most likely to slip through the cracks when work gets busy?

Attention:

- When and where do you think most clearly?
- Which distractions have the biggest impact on your focus?
- What kinds of tasks do you find yourself focusing deeply on?

Time management and organisation:

- What does your best system for keeping track of tasks look like? (And is it actually working right now?)
- When you've had a really productive day, what made it work? What was different about the structure?

Processing information:

- Do you take things in better by reading, listening, or talking it through?
- When you're given something complex, what do you need to process it properly: time, quiet, a conversation, something else?
- How do you find processing information live in meetings?

Emotional regulation:

- What does stress look like for you at work, so I can recognise it rather than misread it?
- Is there anything that consistently triggers frustration or shutdown for you in how we work together?
- What helps you regulate when work feels stressful or emotionally intense?

Sensory environment:

- What in your physical work environment helps you focus, and what makes it harder?
- Are there specific sensory inputs (noise, lighting, temperature, open plan) that drain your energy faster than you'd expect?



Medical and Legal Disclaimer

This resource is for general educational purposes and is not medical advice, a diagnostic tool or legal advice. ADHD and workplace circumstances vary from person to person, so seek advice from an appropriately qualified clinician, HR or employment-law professional where needed.

References (where those stats came from)

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Qualia Collective helps organisations design ways of working where different minds thrive and perform. Created by Laura Wyatt, an organisational psychology-informed consultant and ADHD coach.

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