

PATIENT INFORMATION · MENTAL HEALTH

Adult autism assessment *recognition, not repair*

Autism is a lifelong difference in how a person communicates, processes sensory information and experiences the world. Many autistic adults reach midlife undiagnosed, often after years of being treated for anxiety or depression. Assessment is about understanding, not fixing — and for most people that understanding changes a great deal.

Please seek help promptly if

- you are having **thoughts of harming yourself or ending your life**
- you are in **autistic burnout** and unable to function or care for yourself
- you are experiencing **severe anxiety, low mood or shutdowns**
- you are using **alcohol or drugs** to manage social or sensory demands
- you feel **unable to keep yourself safe**

Autistic adults have substantially higher rates of depression, anxiety and suicidal thinking than the general population — not because of autism itself, but because of the demands of living in an environment not built for them. Call Samaritans free on 116 123 at any hour, text SHOUT to 85258, or call NHS 111 and select the mental health option. Call 999 if you feel unable to stay safe.

How it presents in adults

- **Social communication** — finding unwritten rules confusing, difficulty with small talk, taking things literally, exhaustion after socialising, being told you are blunt or aloof when you did not intend to be
- **Sensory differences** — overwhelmed by noise, light, crowds, smells, certain textures or clothing labels; or seeking particular sensory input
- **Routine and predictability** — distress at unexpected change, strong preferences for how things are done
- **Deep focused interests**, often lifelong and a genuine source of expertise and joy
- **Executive function difficulties** — planning, starting tasks, switching between them
- A long history of feeling different, of watching others to work out how to behave, and of exhaustion afterwards

Masking and burnout

Many autistic adults, particularly women and those diagnosed late, have spent decades consciously copying neurotypical behaviour — rehearsing conversations, forcing eye contact, suppressing natural movement. Masking works, and it is exhausting. Sustained long enough it produces **autistic burnout**: profound fatigue, loss of skills, increased sensory sensitivity and shutdowns, often misread as depression. Recognising masking is frequently the moment things make sense.

What assessment involves

- A **detailed developmental history** from early childhood onwards — an account from a parent or older relative is helpful where available, though not always essential
- A **structured clinical assessment** by specialists, covering communication, social interaction, sensory processing, routines and interests
- **Standardised tools**, which inform rather than determine the outcome
- Consideration of **ADHD, which coexists with autism very frequently**, and of anxiety, trauma and other explanations
- A written report explaining the outcome, whatever it is, and what would help

Why a diagnosis is worth having

- **Self-understanding** — most adults describe this as the single biggest benefit. A lifetime of experiences reframed as difference rather than failure.
- **Workplace adjustments** under the Equality Act 2010 — quieter space, written instructions, notice of change, flexible hours, adjusted interviews.
- **Educational support**, including exam arrangements.
- **Access to appropriate mental health care** — standard therapy often needs adapting to be effective.
- **Permission to stop masking**, and to build a life that fits how you actually function.

Afterwards

Reactions vary enormously — relief, grief for the support you did not get, anger, or a period of reassessing your whole history. All of that is normal. There is no treatment for autism itself and none is needed; what helps is adjusting the environment, managing sensory load, protecting recovery time, and treating any coexisting anxiety, depression or ADHD.

Why be assessed here. NHS adult autism waits in London commonly run to several years. We offer specialist assessment usually within weeks, in an unhurried setting with the sensory environment discussed in advance and adjustments made — quieter appointment times, written communication, a familiar room. You receive a full written report you keep, suitable for employers and universities. We assess for ADHD alongside where indicated, and our psychiatry and psychology teams can support you afterwards on the same clinical record.

Specialist assessment in weeks, not years

Adjustments discussed in advance. Seven days a week, on Whitechapel Road.

Book an appointment

or call 020 7916 0029

Where to get help

Tower Bridge Hospital London

97–99 Whitechapel Road, London E1 1DT

020 7916 0029

WhatsApp **07903 284 189**

info@mhwclinic.co.uk

Open 7 days, 9am–7pm

In an emergency

Call 999, or go to the Royal London Hospital Emergency Department, Whitechapel Road, London E1 1FR.

When we are closed and it is not an emergency

Call NHS 111 or visit 111.nhs.uk.

Related: **[Adult Autism Assessment](#)** · **[ADHD & Autism Assessment](#)** · **[Psychology & Therapy](#)** · **[Mental Health](#)** · **[All patient leaflets](#)**

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This leaflet is based on current NHS and NICE CG142 guidance on autism in adults. It is general information and does not replace advice from a clinician who has assessed you. If your symptoms change or you are worried, contact us on 020 7916 0029, call NHS 111, or call 999 in an emergency.

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