

Neuropsychological Testing for people with Dementia

What is it?

Neuropsychological tests are standardized tests that measure a person's memory, concentration, and problem solving and language skills.

Why is it done?

Neuropsychological tests help doctors diagnose brain disorders and disease. In people with Alzheimer's or other forms of dementia, these tests are also used to evaluate and monitor the individual's mental abilities over time. A typical neuropsychological evaluation will assess:

- General intellect
- Executive skills (e.g., sequencing, reasoning and problem solving skills)
- Attention and concentration
- Learning and memory
- Language
- Visual-spatial skills (perception)
- Motor and sensory skills
- Mood and behavior

How is it done?

Neuropsychologists are licensed psychologists with expertise in brain functions such as memory, language and perception. The neuropsychologist will talk with you to assess your verbal ability in an informal, non-stressful way. You may be asked about your symptoms, medical history, medications and other important factors. You also will be asked to complete a series of pencil and paper or computerized tests such as looking at a picture and selecting a response or reading a paragraph and answering a few questions about what you just read. A testing specialist, or psychometrist, under the supervision of the neuropsychologist, may do this part of the testing. Other tests may be done orally, which means you will be asked to respond to a question or perform a skill such as putting items in a certain order. Some tests will be easy while others will be more complex.

How long does it take?

Depending on the questions to be answered or the study you are participating in, testing might take from twenty minutes to several hours, though you can take breaks whenever you would like. Sometimes, the testing may be scheduled over several days.

Is it covered by insurance?

If you are taking part in testing that is part of a research study, there should be no charge, unless there are special circumstances related to your clinical care. If your testing is related to a referral from your doctor, neuropsychological testing is usually covered by Medicare and most private insurance companies. However, you should check with your own insurance plan or the neuropsychologist to make sure the tests are covered. For people with dementia, neuropsychological testing is considered to be a critical piece of the diagnostic assessment that also includes a complete physical and neurological exam, lab tests, and a brain scan.

How will I benefit from these tests?

- Testing provides a more accurate and earlier diagnosis and can help you and your family better plan for the future.
- Testing can provide a reliable baseline, or starting point, for tracking changes in cognitive function over time.
- Testing provides details about your current strengths and weaknesses and can help families cope with challenges.
- Testing can help guide medical decision-making, such as whether you need other tests or medication.
- Testing also can help you and your family make decisions regarding financial matters, living arrangements, or other activities of daily living.