

Clinical Neuropsychological Assessment

A guide for patients and their families

What is Clinical Neuropsychology?

Clinical Neuropsychologists are experts in the assessment, diagnosis and treatment conditions affecting the brain.

Clinical Neuropsychologists understand brain structure, function and dysfunction, and the effects of multiple factors on thinking, emotion and behaviour.

Why do I need an assessment?

Assessment is usually recommended when changes in thinking skills, emotion or behaviour are reported by yourself or a significant other.

Other times your treating doctor may suggest an assessment to better understand how the different structures and systems of your brain are working.

The assessment may help to:

1. Identify your strengths and weaknesses
2. Identify areas of the brain affected by a condition
3. Clarify a diagnosis
4. Guide treatment recommendations for your personal, educational or vocational needs
5. Document any changes in your functioning over time or before and after medical / surgical intervention.

What is a neuropsychological assessment?

A neuropsychological assessment involves doing tests that are sensitive to changes in brain functioning. This is important particularly when changes are subtle and not evident on screening assessments or brain imaging. Unlike CT or MRI scans which show the structure of the brain (i.e., how the brain looks), the neuropsychological assessment looks at how well the brain is performing on different types of thinking tasks (i.e., how the brain is functioning).

The assessment you do will depend on the questions you and your doctor have however generally the areas assessed include:

- Attention and concentration
- Memory for verbal and visual information
- Information processing speed and ability
- General intellectual and academic skills
- Visual and spatial skills
- Language and communication
- Higher level thinking skills
- Emotional functioning

A neuropsychologist might help to answer questions like...

- Why can't I remember or concentrate like I used to?
- Am I ready to return to work or study after my brain injury?
- Are my difficulties consistent with a specific disorder and what is that likely to be?

What will the assessment involve?

You will have an interview with the neuropsychologist to find out about the concerns that have brought you to this assessment and to collect information about your medical, personal and educational history.

The assessment typically involves completing tasks like answering questions, pencil and paper tasks and working with materials at a table.

It may also be useful for the neuropsychologist to talk to one of your family members to gather additional information about your current situation from another person's perspective.

What will happen after the assessment?

There are at least three ways you might expect to hear about the results of this assessment:

1. The neuropsychologist will write a comprehensive report summarising the results of the assessment outlining any recommendations.
2. The neuropsychologist will send the report to your doctor who will talk to you about the results at your next visit.
3. The neuropsychologist will offer you the opportunity to receive feedback of the results either in person, via phone or by mail.

How long will my assessment take?

The total time for the assessment depends on the type of questions you and your doctor would like to answer.

However, it is recommended that you allow at least **five hours** to complete the assessment.

How should I prepare for my assessment?

In general, it will take several hours to complete the assessment. You will find some tasks easy and some tasks more difficult. The most important thing is to just give your best effort!

Also, it will be helpful for you to:

- Get a good night sleep the night before.
- Have a good breakfast – it will be a long day.
- Take any prescription medications in the usual manner before your assessment.
- Try to relax – remember the purpose of the assessment is to help you, not to trick you!

Please remember to bring:

- Your glasses and/or hearing aids
- Any report of previous neuropsychological assessments or other external investigations (e.g., MRI's, Neurology letters)
- Current medication list.
- Bring some drinks and snacks with you.

What else should I know?

If for any reason you cannot attend your appointment, please contact the Neurology Outpatients Department so that another patient can be scheduled instead.

Neurology Outpatients Phone: **(07) 3646 3111**

