

After an injury or illness that affects the brain, people are commonly referred for cognitive testing, called a neuropsychological evaluation. For people who participate in activities that may put them at risk for injury, such as sport concussion, it is helpful to have a baseline cognitive test so that, if they should get injured in the future, baseline test scores can be compared to post-injury scores. This allows for the most accurate evaluation of the effects of an injury.

Most people know little about the evaluation process. Many are not sure what they will be asked to do, how they should prepare, or who will do the evaluation. The purpose of this document is to provide answers to the most common questions people have about neuropsychological evaluation. Please keep in mind that these are general guidelines. We encourage you to contact your neuropsychology practice to get additional information regarding policies and practices.

1. What is a neuropsychological evaluation?

Neuropsychological evaluation often includes at least 3 components: (1) a review of the individual's medical history, (2) an interview with the individual and, often, another person who knows the individual well (a family member, close friend, or caregiver), and (3) administration of tests that measure the individual's abilities and mood. Using these three sources of information, a neuropsychologist will provide parents with a report that summarizes relevant medical history, the child's evaluation results, areas where his/her cognitive or emotional functioning has changed, and recommendations for school, home, and family.

2. Why do I need a neuropsychological evaluation and what will I learn from it?

A neuropsychological baseline evaluation should provide you with:

- A better understanding of your child's brain's baseline, or pre-concussion, strengths and weaknesses
- A basis of comparison should your child get a head injury in the future

A neuropsychological post-concussion evaluation should provide you with:

- Information for your doctor and care team that will guide your treatment plan and help them to better treat the problems you are experiencing
- Recommendations for your day-to-day life that will help you and your family members with your recovery
- Recommendations to help you succeed in school or work or to live independently

Should your child get a head injury, the evaluation is helpful to answer questions about return to normal life. You may have questions like:

- "Were my child's thinking skills affected by the concussion?"
- "When can s/he go back to school?"
- "What kind of accommodations might s/he need for school?"
- "When can s/he return to playing sports?"

Although doctors are able to look at scans and images of the brain, pictures do not always show how the brain is working and how the brain has been injured. By doing neuropsychological testing, doctors are able to see how an individual's brain is working. These tests will also help you and your doctors understand how your child's abilities and mood have changed. Once the evaluation process is complete, your health care provider will be able to give recommendations that will help develop a plan for getting better.

3. What skills and abilities will neuropsychological tests measure?

Typically, cognitive, or neuropsychological, tests will examine a variety of skills and abilities:

- General Intelligence
- Problem Solving
- Planning and Abstract Thinking
- Attention and Concentration
- Learning and Memory
- Language
- Visual and Spatial Perception
- Motor and Sensory Skills
- Academic Skills

Depending on the illness or injury, the evaluation may focus on some abilities more than others.

4. How long will the testing process take?

The length of testing time depends on your situation and how quickly your child works. Testing is usually completed in 2-2.5 hours and is completed in one day so you will not have to come to multiple appointments. During testing, breaks will be given if your child needs time to stretch, use the rest room, have a drink of water or snack, or just needs a break.

5. What will we be asked to do during a neuropsychological evaluation?

Our evaluation will begin with a general interview with you (the parent). You will be asked questions about your child's history and background. Meanwhile, your child will be asked to do some written and oral tests. For some tests, s/he will be asked to write or draw something and for others, s/he will need to listen and answer questions. Also, s/he may take some of the tests on the computer. S/he will be given instructions for every task and some are timed.

6. Should my child study before taking these tests?

No. There is nothing you or your child needs to study before your neuropsychological evaluation. The tests are trying to get a sense of what you are able to do now, so there is no need to learn any new material or practice skills.

7. Will the evaluation make my child feel uncomfortable or frustrated?

Some of the tasks and questions may be easy and others may be hard. Your child will

be encouraged to try his/her best on all tests. The tests are designed to challenge people. Some people feel frustrated or upset if they don't know all the answers, but other people say the testing process was interesting and fun.

8. When will I find out the results of the evaluation?

The results of the evaluation are presented in a report which is typically mailed to you about 2-3 weeks after your child's testing. The report will include a summary of important medical and personal history, current problems (if applicable) your child is experiencing, test results, a comparison of results to other children your child's age, and recommendations (if any) that will help you and your family. The baseline evaluation report can be referred to for comparison in the future, should your child get a head injury or have any difficulty with his/her thinking skills.