

# FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT NEUROPSYCHOLOGICAL EVALUATION

After an injury or illness that affects the brain, people are commonly referred for neuropsychological evaluation. 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 booklet is to provide answers to the most common questions people have about neuropsychological evaluation.

## **1. What is a neuropsychological evaluation?**

Neuropsychological evaluation often includes at least 3 components: (1) a review of your medical and other records, (2) an interview with you and, often, another person who knows you well (a family member, close friend, or caregiver), and (3) administration of tests that measure your abilities and mood. Using these three sources of information, a neuropsychologist will provide you with a comprehensive report that summarizes relevant medical history, your evaluation results, areas where your cognitive or emotional functioning has changed, and recommendations for work, home, and family.

## **2. Why do I need a neuropsychological evaluation?**

The evaluation is helpful to answer questions about return to normal life. You may have questions like:

- “When can I go back to work?”
- “Can I start driving again?”
- “Can I live by myself or do I need to live with my parents?”
- “What kind of accommodations do I need for school?”

- “Am I depressed or am I just tired?”

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 your brain is working. These tests will also help you and your doctors understand how your abilities and mood have changed. Once you have completed the evaluation process, your health care provider will be able to give you recommendations that will help you and your family to develop a plan for getting better.

### **3. What skills and abilities will neuropsychological tests measure?**

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

### **4. Why is the neuropsychologist asking about my mood?**

After a brain injury or stroke, many people report changes in their mood. Feeling worried, sad, and discouraged are common after an injury. Feelings, emotions, and mood also play an important role on our ability to feel good about our lives and to think. Feeling worried, upset, or down may affect a person’s attention, concentration, or memory. Your neuropsychologist will ask you a number of questions about your current mood to better understand how your feelings and emotions may be affecting your scores on measures of thinking and to see if counseling might be a helpful next step.

### **5. Who will I meet with during my appointment?**

Neuropsychological evaluation is typically done by a clinical neuropsychologist, a psychologist with specialized training in how the brain works. A neuropsychologist uses pencil and paper tests and questionnaires to better understand how the brain is working.

Most neuropsychologists meet with patients for an interview, and specially trained technicians often do the actual testing. A technician or “psychometrist” is someone with advanced training on how to administer the tests.

## **6. What will I learn from a neuropsychological evaluation?**

A neuropsychological evaluation should provide you with:

- a. A better understanding of your brain's strengths and weaknesses.
- b. Information for your doctor and care team that will guide your treatment plan and help them to better treat the problems you are experiencing.
- c. Recommendations for your day-to-day life that will help you and your family members with your recovery.
- d. Recommendations to help you succeed in school or work or to live independently.

## **7. How long will the testing process take?**

The length of testing time depends on your situation and how quickly you work. Testing is usually completed in less than 3 hours but sometimes takes up to 8 hours or longer. Testing is usually completed in one day so you will not have to come to multiple appointments. During testing, you may become tired or need a break. Please be sure to let the person testing you know if you need some time to stretch, use the rest room, have a drink of water or snack, or just need a break.

## **8. What will I be asked to do during a neuropsychological evaluation?**

Typically, a neuropsychological evaluation will begin with a general interview. You will be asked questions about your history and background. Your answers will help the neuropsychologist know you better and get a good understanding of your symptoms. If a friend or family member comes with you, they may be included in the interview to help explain problems and concerns. Next, you will do written and oral tests. For some tests, you will be asked to write or draw something and for others you will need to listen and answer questions. Also, you may take some of the tests on the computer. You will be given instructions for every task and some are timed.

## **9. Do I need to study before I take these tests?**

No. There is nothing you need 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.

## **10. How can I prepare for my evaluation? What should I bring?**

Different practices have different requirements. In general, however, the following guidelines may be helpful.

- a. Make sure you get a good night's sleep the night before.
- b. Make sure you have plenty of time to get to your appointment. Give yourself plenty of time for travel, to find the location, and for parking.
- c. Make sure you eat something before you arrive so that you are comfortable until the lunch break.
- d. If you wear hearing aids or eyeglasses, bring them with you.
- e. If questionnaires were mailed to you, complete them and bring them with you to your appointment.
- f. Take your medication(s) as you normally do, unless your doctor has told you otherwise.
- g. Bring a snack, your lunch, or money to buy lunch.
- h. Bring your insurance card(s) and picture ID.
- i. Bring medical records that are related to your current illness or injury.
- j. If you are in school, bring current academic records.
- k. If asked, bring your caregiver, close family member, or friend. Often they can provide helpful information to better understand your situation.

#### **11. Will the evaluation make me feel uncomfortable or frustrated?**

Some of the tasks and questions may be easy and others may be hard. Be sure to try your best on all tests. The tests are designed to challenge you. 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.

#### **12. Will the evaluation cost me anything?**

Payment for a neuropsychological evaluation depends on your situation.

- For some people, the evaluation is paid for by their *health insurance carrier*. You will be required to pay any applicable copay or deductible. Most insurance companies limit the number of hours for which they will pay for testing. Also, most insurance companies only allow one evaluation per calendar year.
- For other people, the fee for the evaluation may be paid for by another payer source such as Workers' Compensation or Department of Rehabilitative Services. In some situations, your evaluation may be paid through your medical/legal personal injury case.
- You may also pay for an evaluation out of pocket if the testing is not a covered benefit with your insurance carrier or if you do not have health insurance.
- You may contact your provider to see if there are any other payment options.

### **13. What should I expect from a neuropsychological evaluation? Will I find out the results of the evaluation?**

The results of the evaluation are normally presented in a report. A copy of the report explaining the test results will be provided to you if requested. The report will typically include: a summary of the tests you were given, a summary of important medical and personal history, current problems you are experiencing, test results, a comparison of your results to other people your age, and recommendations that will help you and your family move forward in getting better. We recommend that you take some time to read over the report, think about questions you have, and review the report with your referring or treating doctor.

If you would like to discuss the results and recommendations in your report, ask your neuropsychologist about a feedback session. During the feedback session you will be given a chance to ask questions and talk about concerns.

### **14. Who gets the results of my evaluation?**

Your neuropsychological evaluation results are written into a confidential report. Typically, the only people who can read the report are you (the patient) and the provider who made the referral (i.e., physician, rehabilitation specialist, or lawyer). You may choose to give the results to other people, or you can ask for them to be released to other people by signing a Release of Information form. We encourage patients to get and keep a copy of their report for their personal records.

### **15. What are the results used for?**

The results can be used for a number of things, and will depend on your situation. In general, results can be used:

- To understand your current strengths and weaknesses. If you do more testing in the future, your neuropsychologist can see how your abilities change over time.
- To help your rehabilitation team come up with the best treatment plan for your current difficulties.
- To help you make decisions about returning to work or school.
- To help you be more successful at work or school.
- To make recommendations for additional treatment that will help you with recovery.
- To refer you to other professionals who can help you.
- To provide information if you are involved in a court case.

- To provide you with some ways to cope with impairments and improve relationships.
- To provide information, resources, or recommendations to your family as they help you with recovery.
- To help document your disability (e.g., social security claims).
- To help determine if counseling could help you.

## **16. Will you tell me what I can and can't do after the evaluation?**

Many people worry that their evaluation results will be used to make decisions about whether they can drive, go back to work, manage their own money, cook, stay home alone, etc. These decisions may be ultimately made by you, your physician, and your family. However, based on your strengths and weaknesses, a neuropsychologist will make recommendations that seem to fit your life at this time. These recommendations are focused on your safety and letting you be as independent as possible. If you have questions or concerns about recommendations in your report, meet with the neuropsychologist who did your evaluation.

Remember that neuropsychological testing is a "snapshot" of your abilities at one point in time. People who actively engage in physical and emotional therapies can show many improvements over time. Your recommendations may include setting up an appointment for reevaluation after a certain amount of time. If you complete a reevaluation, your neuropsychologist will look at your abilities again and will likely make adjustments to old recommendations.