

Neuropsychology Assessment

Lothian Older People's Psychology Service

Information for patients and carers

This information leaflet is aimed to answer any questions, or concerns you may have, and to help you to make an informed decision regarding whether neuropsychological assessment would be of benefit to you.

Why have I been referred for a neuropsychological assessment?

Minor changes to the brain can be a normal part of getting older. Sometimes other things such as major life events, stress, anxiety and depression, stroke, dementia, or other physical health problems can affect how our brain works. Often people are referred because they, or their family or close friends, have noted some changes in their abilities, for example short-term memory problems.

The purpose of a neuropsychological assessment is to see if any changes have occurred, to explore what may have caused this, and to help to identify what kind of help or treatment may be of benefit to you.

What is a neuropsychological assessment?

A neuropsychological assessment is way of helping us to understand how your brain is working, and how different parts of the brain are communicating with each other. It involves completing a series of tasks, which helps us look at the skills we use on a day-to-day basis including memory, language, problem solving, attention and concentration.

It is not a medical procedure and does not involve brain scans, blood tests or any other medical process. It is usually one part of a larger assessment and treatment plan.

What will happen at the first appointment?

Your initial appointment will be with a Psychologist who has specialist knowledge of how to complete neuropsychological assessment. The Psychologist will ask you questions about any difficulties you might be having as well as other aspects of your life so as to get a more complete picture of you as a person and your situation. This may include questions about your medical and family history, your day-to-day functioning and activities, and about how you are feeling within yourself.

This can last one or two appointments. It can be useful to bring a family member, or a close friend, as they may be able to provide another perspective on your concerns and background history.

If you do not bring a friend or family member with you, the Psychologist may ask your permission to speak to a close family member or friend.

It is very important to know if you are still driving as you may need to notify the DVLA of the outcome of the assessment.

What if I do not want to have a neuropsychological assessment?

This is entirely your decision. You can decide whether or not you would like to proceed with the neuropsychological assessment. Please discuss this with your Psychologist during the initial interview session if you have any concerns.

Assessment tasks / puzzles

If you decide to proceed with the neuropsychological assessment, you will then be invited to complete a range of short tasks, which involve remembering information, solving puzzles or problems, and drawing and reading.

The appointments usually last an hour and you may need to attend up to three appointments.

The assessment will involve different tasks which may include pictures, words and sounds. The tasks that are selected for you will depend on the information gathered from your history, medical notes and on the information you provide at the initial session.

How should I prepare for the assessment?

There is no special preparation required, although it is worth avoiding activities that will leave you feeling fatigued on the day of the assessment. There is no need to stop taking prescribed medication but you should avoid alcohol and recreational drugs in the 24 hours before your appointments.

Please bring a list of prescription medications that you are currently taking regularly.

If you need glasses or a hearing aid, please bring these to your assessment appointments.

Please also let us know if you have difficulties with hearing, reading, writing, or colour vision.

Who is present during the assessment?

You are welcome to bring a friend or relative for the initial part of the session. However, it is important that the room is quiet and free from distraction during the tasks completed as part of the assessment to ensure the best and most accurate results during testing. Therefore family members or friends are usually asked to leave the room during these tasks and they are more than welcome to wait for you in our waiting area.

Are there any risks or complications?

Neuropsychological assessments are non-invasive and do not require any physical examination, injections or drugs.

However, you will be asked to use your brain in different ways and this can be tiring for some people. You may also feel anxious about having to do a 'test' and it can be distressing for people if they find the assessment tasks difficult.

Feedback and results

After the assessment is completed you will be offered a further appointment to discuss the results with the Psychologist.

By carefully assessing your thinking skills, we can gather detailed information about your memory and thinking abilities. We will take into account your age, current and previous abilities, and will consider how you did in comparison to other people your age. This information then helps to:

- Explain why certain thinking tasks might be difficult for you
- Provide a baseline of your current functioning that we can compare against in the future to identify any potential changes
- Provide information that doctors may need to make a diagnosis
- Teach you skills to help improve memory, concentration or other thinking skills
- Offer support and advice to you or your family
- Provide information on other services that may be able to help
- Inform relevant health professionals, understand any difficulties and inform potential treatment plans.

What about confidentiality?

The results of the evaluation are considered confidential. Usually the Psychologist would routinely write to your General Practitioner (GP) and the person who referred you to summarise the outcome of your assessment.

You can request a written copy of your results if you wish to have one. It is your decision whether you share the results with family members or friends.

If you have any questions or concerns about confidentiality, please discuss this with your Psychologist.

There are some occasions where your Psychologist may need to break your confidentiality if there were a serious risk of harm to either yourself, or to other people. However, they would, if at all possible, discuss this with you first.

Contact us

Telephone: 0131 537 6901

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