Clinical neuropsychology is a specialty that looks at the relationship between how the brain is functioning and problems in performing everyday tasks and activities.

Unlike neuroimaging studies that look at the structure and physiological functioning of the brain, neuropsychological evaluations measure the cognitive and behavioral output of the brain through special ability tests. These individually-administered tests comprehensively evaluate mental abilities. The tests are objective and require the patient to directly demonstrate their level of competence in a particular cognitive domain.

The neuropsychologist looks at a patient’s pattern of performance on these tests to construct a profile of the person’s cognitive strengths and weaknesses. This can provide important information as to why they may be having such difficulties with thinking quickly, learning and remembering new things, expressing themselves, and solving new problems.

Although neuropsychological tests measure mental abilities, they are considered medical procedures by most insurance companies because they look at how the brain is functioning.

What to Expect at the Neuropsychological Evaluation

- Neuropsychological evaluations are scheduled in 4-hour blocks of time.

- You will meet with a CACIR neuropsychologist to briefly discuss your history and any cognitive difficulties you may be experiencing.

- A neuropsychological technician will then guide you through a number of tests that will test your cognitive abilities. Most people find the tests interesting and compare the experience to being on a game show or back in school.

- You do not need to do anything special for your exam. You should take your medications as usual and eat breakfast or lunch before coming for your appointment. If you wear reading glasses or hearing aids, you should bring them with you.

Cognitive Abilities Tested:

- Verbal and Nonverbal Intelligence
- Executive Abilities (Planning, Problem Solving, etc.)
- Attention and Concentration
- Learning and Memory
- Expressive and Receptive Language Skills
- Visual and Spatial Functions
- Psychomotor Skills
- Emotional Status

How Are Test Results Used?

- Aides in diagnosis by providing your doctor with an accurate description of your cognitive strengths and weaknesses
- Gives you and your family information on how you are doing compared to other people with similar backgrounds
- Can be used to monitor changes over time
- Assist in developing strategies to better manage cognitive difficulties and their impact on daily activities

Please take a handout with you for more detailed information on neuropsychological evaluations and how the testing process is related to the overall medical evaluation and functional management of symptoms.

The University of Utah Center for Alzheimer's Care, Imaging & Research