What is a neuropsychological evaluation?

- A neuropsychological evaluation is an assessment of how the brain functions.
- It examines how well the brain is working when it performs certain functions, such as memory. It is different from CAT scans and MRIs, which show the structure of the brain.
- The neuropsychological evaluation involves questions and answers, or working with materials on a table, or working on a computer.
- The evaluation helps to answer questions about functioning of normal life activities, such as “Can I go back to work?” or “What kind of accommodations do I need for school?”

How can someone get a neuropsychological exam?

A referral is needed from a primary care physician or other medical specialist for this assessment. Depending on what insurance someone has, a prior authorization may be needed as well.

How to prepare

These are not tests that one can study for, but there are several things that can be done to prepare for the evaluation:

- Bring a current list of ALL medications and doses.
- If the individual has difficulty providing information about their history, it is helpful for a family member or friend to accompany them for at least part of the clinical interview.
- If possible, bring records of previous testing, such as CT or MRI scans, and/or results from previous neuropsychological evaluations, especially if completed at another hospital or institution.

How long will the evaluation take?

A complete evaluation may take between 3 and 8 hours to complete, depending on the complexity of the issues being addressed by the evaluation. Be sure to let the person doing the testing know if a break is needed to stretch, use the bathroom, get a snack or to just rest.

What skills and abilities will the test measure?

This test will examine a variety of skills and abilities such as problem solving, attention, memory, language, visual perception, sensory skills, and general intelligence. Depending on the injury, the evaluation may focus on other things as well and some more than others.

How will the results of the evaluation help?

- The results can provide a guide to better understand the strengths and weaknesses of the individual’s brain.
- The results can give information that the doctor or care team can use to guide a treatment plan and better address problems and challenges that the individual may be having. It will also provide recommendations for day-to-day life that will help the individual, as well as family members, with recovery and more independent living.
- Depending on the injury, this evaluation may also provide a diagnostic code called an ICD-10 code, which may help to qualify for disability-related benefits, such as the New Mexico Brain Injury Services Fund (BISF).