

Matt F. Butryn, Ph.D., LLC

Clinical Neuropsychologist

Pediatric, Adult, and Forensic Psychology

What is a Neuropsychologist?

If you've been referred to a neuropsychologist, you may have wondered, what is neuropsychology? The word gives us part of what we need to know. The field of neuropsychology combines neurology, the study of the nervous system, with psychology, the study of the mind and how it affects behavior.

Neuropsychologists look at how a brain injury or illness can impact your daily life. Brain trauma can affect these aspects of behavior:

- Cognitive — your thought processes
- Social — how you get along with others
- Physical — how you move and how your body functions
- Emotional — how you feel apart from your physical being

Are Neuropsychologists Medical Doctors?

Neuropsychologists are not medical doctors. Instead of prescribing medicine or performing procedures, they perform tests and analyze the results. Someone with a medical degree who works in the field is called a neuropsychiatrist. Clinical neuropsychologists work with people with brain disease or injury, usually in a medical facility or private practice. Cognitive neuropsychologists work in academic fields or research.

What Do Neuropsychologists Do?

The main job of neuropsychologists is diagnostic. They offer tests to determine how well your brain is functioning. The tests allow them to figure out why you might have difficulty in a particular part of your life.

If you have a brain illness or injury, you may not feel like yourself. A neuropsychologist can help you understand what is going on and give you some ways to cope. They can also refer you to others who can help, such as physical therapists or speech therapists.

Neurologists work closely with medical doctors. They may work, for instance, with Neurologists, Neurosurgeons, Psychiatrists, and Primary Care Physicians.

How Does One Learn Neuropsychology?

It isn't easy to get into a program in neuropsychology. Once admitted, neuropsychologists will train for years before becoming fully qualified. The steps can vary a bit from state to state, but the basic requirements are the same. They include:

- A bachelor's degree, usually in a field such as biology or psychology
- An advanced degree in neuropsychology, usually a doctoral degree rather than a master's
- Post-doctoral field experience
- A license earned in part by a passing score on the Examination for Professional Practice in Psychology (EPPP)



www.athensbrain.com

Who Might Need a Neuropsychology Evaluation?

Neuropsychologists work with people of all ages and stages of life. Often, neurologists might work with children and adolescents with academic challenges, adults with problems at work or home, and older adults with declining abilities

Neuropsychologists often work with people with conditions that affect the brain, such as dementia, mild cognitive impairment, head injury, stroke, epilepsy, movement disorders such as Parkinson's disease, diseases affecting the central nervous system such as multiple sclerosis, mood disorders, learning disorders, ADD/ADHD, and brain tumors.

You might need to see a neuropsychologist if you have symptoms such as inability to concentrate, difficulty with organization, lack of reasoning ability, problems with coordination, personality/mood changes, difficulties with speech and language, memory deficits, and problems processing sensory input.

Neuropsychologists also work with individuals who are scheduled for brain surgery. They map out sections of the brain that control certain functions, since the precise areas that control speech and language can vary. Neuropsychologists may assess individuals after surgery. They look for ways that surgery might have affected brain function. Their findings can guide post-surgical care. Neuropsychologists also can help individuals manage their emotions as they meet the challenges that come with surgery.

What Happens During Neuropsychological Testing?

A neuropsychological evaluation involves gathering information and administering tests. Before the testing portion, your neuropsychologist may request a complete family health history, learn what medical conditions you have, find out your concerns, and review your medications. A friend or family member should go with you to help with this process.

The next part of the evaluation involves taking standardized tests. These tests must be given the same way every time to get valid results. Some are pen-and-pencil tests. The neuropsychologist will determine which tests are appropriate.

A neuropsychological evaluation may take from 2 to 8 hours, depending upon the complexity of the symptoms. Also, some people may need more time to complete the tests or extra time between tests.

If you need a neuropsychological exam, don't worry. Make your test day go smoothly by following these suggestions:

- Get a good night's sleep before your exam.
- Don't drink alcohol for 24 hours before your tests.
- If you are on medication, ask your doctor whether you should take it before your test.
- Have a positive mental attitude.

What Happens After a Neuropsychological Evaluation?

After you take your tests, your neuropsychologist will score, interpret, and write a report about the results for the referring doctor. Your tests will give your doctor precise information about how you are functioning. If this is your first neuropsychological exam, the tests may establish a baseline. Then, your doctor can tell if your condition improves or worsens. Your doctor may also use the results to confirm a working diagnosis or to suggest a different diagnosis. By looking at your results, your care team can decide what services or treatment you might need.