



## TESTING FOR ASSESSING COGNITIVE IMPAIRMENT

Carers are often the people who are the first to hear from patients and families about possible memory loss or dementia. These guidelines aim to help carers to identify cognitive problems and possible causes. This information may help prepare for the future.

### What is cognitive impairment?

It is a condition where a person has trouble remembering, learning new things, concentrating or making day to day decisions. It can be mild where a person may still be able to do everyday activities or severe where, for example, talking and writing abilities decline resulting in the inability to live independently.

### Why is it important to assess by screening for cognitive impairment in older adults?

Various tests may be carried out by a doctor. Failure to evaluate memory or cognitive complaints may hinder treatment and other responses such as safety of patients

There are several benefits of carrying out early screening:

If screening is negative, concerns may be alleviated even if temporarily

If screening is positive and further evaluation is called for, leading to the following possible results:

- Treating the underlying disease or health condition
- Managing related conditions more effectively
- Addressing potential safety issues
- Allows the patient to create or update any instructions (e.g. financial planning) or long term care.
- Ensuring the patient will have a carer or someone else to help with medical, legal and financial concerns.
- Ensuring the carer receives the information needed.
- Encourages participation in clinical research.

### How is Cognitive Impairment Evaluated?

A combination of approaches may be used including testing and obtaining information from carers.

Interviews with patients are an important part of the process. These are best conducted with the patient alone so that family members or companions cannot prompt the patient.

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