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# Mental Status Tests

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Overview

Test Reasons

Test Procedures

Preparation

Afterward

Read This Next

Part 1 of 5: Overview

## What Are Mental Status Tests?

**Mental status tests** are done to test an individual's cognitive function. The tests can be given by a number of different healthcare providers, including physicians, physician assistants, and nurses. A psychologist can do more in-depth testing.

Mental status tests will examine your appearance, orientation, attention span, memory, language skills, and judgment skills. Mental status testing may also be referred to as mental status examination or neurocognitive testing.

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Part 2 of 5: Test Reasons

## Reasons for Testing

## Reasons for Testing

Mental status testing can be done to help diagnose mental illnesses or conditions affecting the brain. Mental status testing can help diagnose:

- Alzheimer's disease
- attention deficit disorder (ADD)
- bipolar disorder
- dementia
- head trauma
- histrionic personality disorder
- mental retardation
- organic brain syndrome (OBS), a term used to describe diminished mental function due to a medical condition other than a psychiatric disease
- schizophrenia
- stroke
- transient ischemia attack (TIA), a ministroke that lasts only minutes

Part 3 of 5: Test Procedures

## What Happens During the Test ?

The main type of mental status test used is the mini-mental state examination (MMSE), also known as the Folstein test. In this test, the examiner will observe your appearance, orientation, attention span, memory, language skills, and judgment skills.

### Appearance

The examiner will look to see if you look your age. He or she will also look for any physical features that are associated with certain conditions, such as the almond-shaped eyes associated with Down syndrome. The examiner will look to see if you are well-groomed. He or she will look to see if you are dressed appropriately for the situation and the weather.

Your examiner will look for cues to see how comfortable you are in social situations. He or she will observe your body language. The examiner will look for movements that are characteristic of certain conditions, such as excessive movement or muscle contractions. He or she will observe how you make eye contact. He or she will look for excessive or minimal eye contact.

### Orientation

Your orientation to time, place, and person will be tested. Abnormal orientation may be indicative of alcohol use, use of certain drugs, head trauma, nutritional deficiencies, or organic brain syndrome.

To test your orientation, the examiner will ask you questions. He or she may ask you your name and age. You will also be asked about your job, as well as where you live. You may also be asked where you are, what today's date is, and what the current season is.

### Attention Span

Your attention span will be tested so the examiner can determine if you are able to finish your thoughts, if you are able to solve problems, and if you are easily

distracted. An abnormal attention span can indicate attention deficit disorder (ADD), personality disorders, and schizophrenia.

(ADD), personality disorders, and schizophrenia.

The examiner may ask you to count backward from a certain number or spell a short word both forward and backward. You may also be asked to follow spoken instructions.

#### Memory

Both your recent and long-term memory will be tested. A loss of recent memory usually indicates a medical problem, whereas a loss of long-term memory can indicate dementia. The examiner will ask you about current events such as who the president is. He or she may also ask you about recent events in your life such as a recent trip.

To test your memory, your examiner will say three words to you. You will be asked to repeat these words after a few minutes. The examiner will also test your long-term memory by asking you questions about your childhood and schooling.

#### Language

Language testing will only be done if the individual being tested is literate. If the test subject has never been able to read or write, it is important to let the examiner know that. The language tests will check reading and writing skills, as well as comprehension of words. Abnormal language results may indicate dementia, head trauma, stroke, or TIA.

For language testing, you may be asked to write a complete sentence or follow a written direction. The examiner will also ask you to name certain common items in the room, such as a pen or table. He or she may also ask you to name as many words as you can that start with a certain letter or fit into a specific category, such as types of food or types of animals.

#### Judgment

Judgment testing assesses your ability to solve problems and your ability to make acceptable decisions. Abnormal judgement results may indicate schizophrenia, mental retardation, or organic brain syndrome.

You may be asked to draw a clock that indicates a certain time. You may also be asked what you would do in several different situations that you might encounter in daily life. For example, you may be asked what you would do if you were in a store and wanted to get something, or what you would do if you found somebody's wallet on the ground.

Part 4 of 5: Preparation

## How to Prepare for the Test

Educational level and fluency in English can influence an individual's score on the MMSE. It's important to let your doctor know if English is not your primary language. Also give him or her a description of your educational history, for example, whether you graduated from college or if you are a high school graduate.

Part 5 of 5: Afterward

## What to Expect After the Test

Your doctor will discuss your results with you and/or your spouse or family member. If you were given the test after an injury, your doctor will probably repeat the test later to gauge your progress.

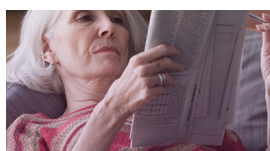
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