

Key elements of a cognition-focused evaluation

- Chief complaint, e.g. newly diagnosed Alzheimer's disease, has withdrawn from social activities, confusion
- History of present illness. For previously diagnosed patients, a brief recapitulation may be sufficient; for patients presenting for the first time with obvious cognitive impairment but who have not yet had a diagnostic evaluation, a detailed history of the present illness is particularly crucial.
- Review of medical history, especially conditions that require ongoing self-management and monitoring, such as diabetes, hypertension, and other chronic medical conditions, and those that may add to cognitive impairment, such as atrial fibrillation, heart failure, stroke, chronic renal insufficiency, and chronic lung disease.
- Type of cognitive impairment, established by evaluations that may include cognitive testing, brain imaging, laboratory "rule-out" tests (such as thyroid stimulating hormone and vitamin B12). Common types include mild cognitive impairment (modest cognitive decline that does not interfere with everyday activities), dementia (evidence of significant cognitive impairment that interferes with everyday activities), Alzheimer's disease (the most common form of dementia), vascular dementia, dementia with Lewy bodies, frontotemporal dementia, mixed dementia (2 or more known etiologies, most commonly Alzheimer's and vascular dementia). In some cases the cause of cognitive impairment may not be known at the time of care planning, in which case the care plan should include plans for further differential diagnostic assessment as indicated.
- Known allergies/intolerances
- Current medications, including over the counter drugs
- Review of systems with attention to those with diagnostic or therapeutic implications, e.g. visual hallucinations, gait disturbances, falls, tremors, sleep disturbances.
- Neurological exam, especially focused on tremor, rigidity, gait impairment and fall risk, other Parkinson-like symptoms, lateralized motor impairment.
- Functional status
- Stage of cognitive impairment, from mild cognitive impairment to severe dementia
- Assessment for depression