



Support, Educate, Advocate

Mitochondrial Disease Action Committee

Why are neuropsychological tests necessary?

Often children with long term chronic illness during the ages of 3-5, need to have initial assessments of cognitive impairments or learning disabilities due to medical or psychiatric conditions. These assessments are often referred to as Neuropsychological Testing or "NPT". These tests are often administered every three years after the initial date of testing to correctly manage any educational accommodations or modifications that need to be updated. Here are a few examples of when NPT testing may be "medically" necessary:

1. To assess neuro/cognitive abilities following a traumatic brain injury, stroke or neurosurgery, or relating to a medical diagnosis, such as Mitochondrial Disease.
2. To differentiate diagnosis between psychological and neurological symptoms.
3. To monitoring the progression of cognitive impairment secondary to neurological disorders.
4. To aid in developing educational accommodations and modification supports for academic success.

A typical NPT can take anywhere from 6 to 8 hours, which normally includes administrating, scoring and interpretation of the exam. There are times that the test can be broken up into smaller intervals if medically necessary as well. Most insurance differentiate how they will pay for NPT testing by using two categories. Either medically or psychologically necessary as a qualification factor. Medical NPT tests are normally covered under the medical aspect of insurance*(see next paragraph) and psychological NPT testing would normally be covered under the "mental health" benefit if offered.

Most times Mitochondrial patients are evaluated as a "medical" evaluation, and it is imperative when speaking and requesting a NPT that providers state that for the majority of Mitochondrial patients that pre approval be obtained from a "medical" authorization, not "mental health benefit". It is imperative to remember, that at times NPT testing for educational reasons is not covered by many insurances unless it is deemed "medically necessary", and often pre approvals are denied, based on a lack of understanding that it is medically necessary. 50% of the time, when a written letter of recommendation accompanies the pre approval and the necessity for "medical" reasoning, NPT testing is approved.

If you can't get your private insurance provider to approve the NPT, don't panic! This testing is usually provided by school systems under applicable state and federal rules, so in the event that you are unable to attain private coverage for NPT, you may request this testing be done in the school environment through your schools Special Education Administration Office. Often a

written request to a primary teacher or resource teacher will prompt the appropriate parties to meet and discuss why as parents you would like this NPT to be done. You should not be denied NPT through your public school systems. So now that the basics have been explained as to what NPT is, let's talk about what information we gather from the NPT results that aid in establishing an educational plan for your child.

NPT is normally used in the educational context with children with suspicion of a learning disorder leading to changes in school performance, so as to differentiate between mental subnormality, emotional disturbance, and the specific learning/medical disabilities that may occur in speech and reading while developing.

Neuropsychological testing is also used to develop a specialized treatment plan to help the child improve the performance of these cognitive functions leading to a better performance in school. When testing results are reported and parents can meet to establish either an Individual Education Plan (IEP), and/or Medical 504 Plan, the NPT testing is very important to have already had completed, as it is used as a baseline to establish the necessary supports.

Often medical issues interfere with Mito patients as they attempt to attend school due to variable symptoms which impact their academic successes on a moment to moment basis. Such as, extreme fatigue, vision acuity disturbances, learning disabilities, extended absences, and so forth. Not to minimize the many symptoms that Mito patients go through, but let's stay focused.

Basic NPT consists of the following tests: Halsted-Reitan neuropsychological battery or its components; Luria-Nebraska; Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale (WAIS); Wechsler Intelligence Scales for Children - Revised (WISC-R); Wechsler Memory Scale; and the Reitan-Indiana neuropsychological test. For further discussion about what each of these tests measure please visit our Educational Support Forum.

NPT testing not only allows parents and educators to see where the child's strength and weaknesses are emotionally due to chronic long term illness, but also evaluates what academic strengths and weaknesses may appear daily due to their medical diagnosis. With this information all specialist, educators and parents can devise a means of properly supporting and educating both medically and academically those children who need accommodations or modifications to succeed academically while fighting a long term, chronic illness.