

6 Geriatric Assessments

As people age, their ability to conduct various aspects of routine living may come into question. Too often, however, assessments of when such thresholds have been crossed are triggered by a crisis, such as a fall, a stroke or another emergency situation. Unfortunately, crisis-triggered assessments may be more complicated to execute and less accurate.

Scheduling assessments before such events occur might avoid the crisis and help older adults make decisions before events take those decisions out of their hands.

Geriatricians (geriatric specialists) in your area can be found by visiting HealthInAging.org. These specialists can pull together a whole team of professionals to provide a full-picture assessment, potentially including:

PHYSICAL ASSESSMENT - physical health status, review of medications and how chronic conditions are being managed—and how they could be managed better.

FUNCTIONAL ASSESSMENT - to help determine mobility status and any current or near-future challenges before they become dangerous.

MENTAL ASSESSMENT - to flag any functional or emotional issues such as dementia or depression (which is more common in the elderly than in any other age group, and results in more suicides than in teen years).

COGNITIVE ASSESSMENT - to help determine if there are any memory or decision-making issues that may make it difficult to handle bill paying and/or financial management chores.

HOME ASSESSMENT - to determine if the home is safe for aging in place and what can be done to make it safer through home modification, devices and equipment.

PROFESSIONAL DRIVING ASSESSMENT - These are comprised of driving skills evaluation and clinical driving assessments. The first is an in-car evaluation of driving abilities and may include recommendations for specialized driver training to extend the time an older adult can continue to safely drive. The clinical evaluation helps to identify any underlying health issues that may impact safe driving and offers ways to address those issues to continue driving safely.

Check your health insurance before having any geriatric assessments. A doctor's referral may mean the assessment will be covered by your private insurance, Medicare or Medicaid.

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