

Advancing a new occupational therapy construct using novel methods to assess the cognitive foundation of independent living skill competency: Functional Cognition

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Introduction

- Functional cognition: the cognitive abilities required to perform everyday activities¹
- The construct of functional cognition is a central focus for occupational therapists internationally^{1, 2, 3}
- The **Menu Task**, a standardized functional cognitive screening test, designed to be quick and sensitive to performance deficits to meet the needs of practicing clinicians⁴

Example of Menu Task testing materials:

THE MENU TASK
INSTRUCTION SHEET

Please read these instructions carefully before starting.

Please follow the Menu Task completion rules listed below:

- You may ask any questions while reading these instructions but once you start the Menu Task, do not speak to the examiner until you tell them that you are finished
- Tell the examiner when you have finished reading these instructions
- Start the Menu Task when you are ready and tell the examiner as you start
- Tell the examiner when you have finished the Menu Task
- Complete the Menu Task as quickly and accurately as possible

Menu Selection Instructions:

- Select one meal item for each of the following meals: breakfast, lunch, and dinner
- Select one afternoon and one evening snack
- Select two beverages for breakfast, two beverages for lunch, and one beverage for dinner
- Use pen or pencil to indicate each item you select on the menu. If you select an item more than once indicate the number of times you are selecting it (for example, X2)

Please follow the Menu Selection rules listed below:

- Select two or more Heart Healthy food items [♥]. Heart Healthy items can be either a snack or a meal
- Do not exceed 1800 total calories for all the food items selected
- Do not exceed 58 total fluid ounces for all the beverages selected
- Do not count calories for beverages.

M E N U

----- BREAKFAST -----

2 Eggs, Sausage, Hash Browns and Toast, 1000 calories
Oatmeal with Raisins and Nuts, 300 calories ♥
Corned Beef Hash and Eggs, 1000 calories
Waffles and Syrup, 800 calories
Fresh Fruit Selection, 200 calories



Fruit Juice (8 ounces) Coffee or Tea (12 ounces) Milk (12 ounces)

----- LUNCH -----

Grilled Chicken Salad, 800 calories ♥
Hamburger and French Fries, 1200 calories
Southwest Salad, 350 calories
Chicken Fried Steak, 1000 calories
Cottage Cheese and Vegetable Medley, 400 calories ♥



Fruit Juice (8 ounces) Coffee or Tea (12 ounces) Milk (12 ounces)
Diet Soda (16 ounces)

Aim:

To describe the validation of a new functional cognitive screening test, the Menu task in an acute hospital general medical population

Methods

Cross-sectional study in an acute care hospital in the Midwest United States

Data collection:

- Demographic/discharge information
- Menu Task
- Mini-Cog
- Activity Measure for Postacute Care (AM-PAC) 6-clicks for basic mobility and daily activities

Convenience sample of 104 previously community dwelling patients, referred to occupational therapy who provided written consent, excluding those with dementia or delirium

Procedures: Team of occupational therapists administered the Menu Task and the Mini-Cog. Demographic/discharge information and AM-PAC scores were gathered from health records



Results

Table 1 Participant characteristics and scores of the study measures.

Demographics and measures	Mean (SD)	Range
Demographic characteristics (N=104)		
Age (y)	70.75 (12.21)	26-94
Education (y)	13.29 (5.98)	9-26
No. of chronic diseases	2.86 (1.71)	0-7
Length of stay (d)	10.17 (10.06)	1-75
Mean time to administer the MT (min)	8.40 (6.22)	1.52-36
	N	%
Sex		
Male	62	60
Female	42	40
Race/ethnicity		
White	96	92
Black	5	5
Other	2	3

Measures	Mean (SD)	Range	% Impaired/Dependent
MT total score	6.55 (2.14)	1-11	79.8
Mini-Cog total score	2.86 (1.50)	0-5	64.4
AM-PAC – Basic Mobility	16.48 (4.69)	6-24	52.0
AM-PAC – Daily Activity	17.84 (3.75)	6-24	59.3

Results

Scores on the Menu Task were unrelated to basic mobility ($r = .06$) and basic activities of daily living ($r = .17$) measured by the AM-PAC. Similar correlations were observed between the Mini-Cog and AM-PAC tests.

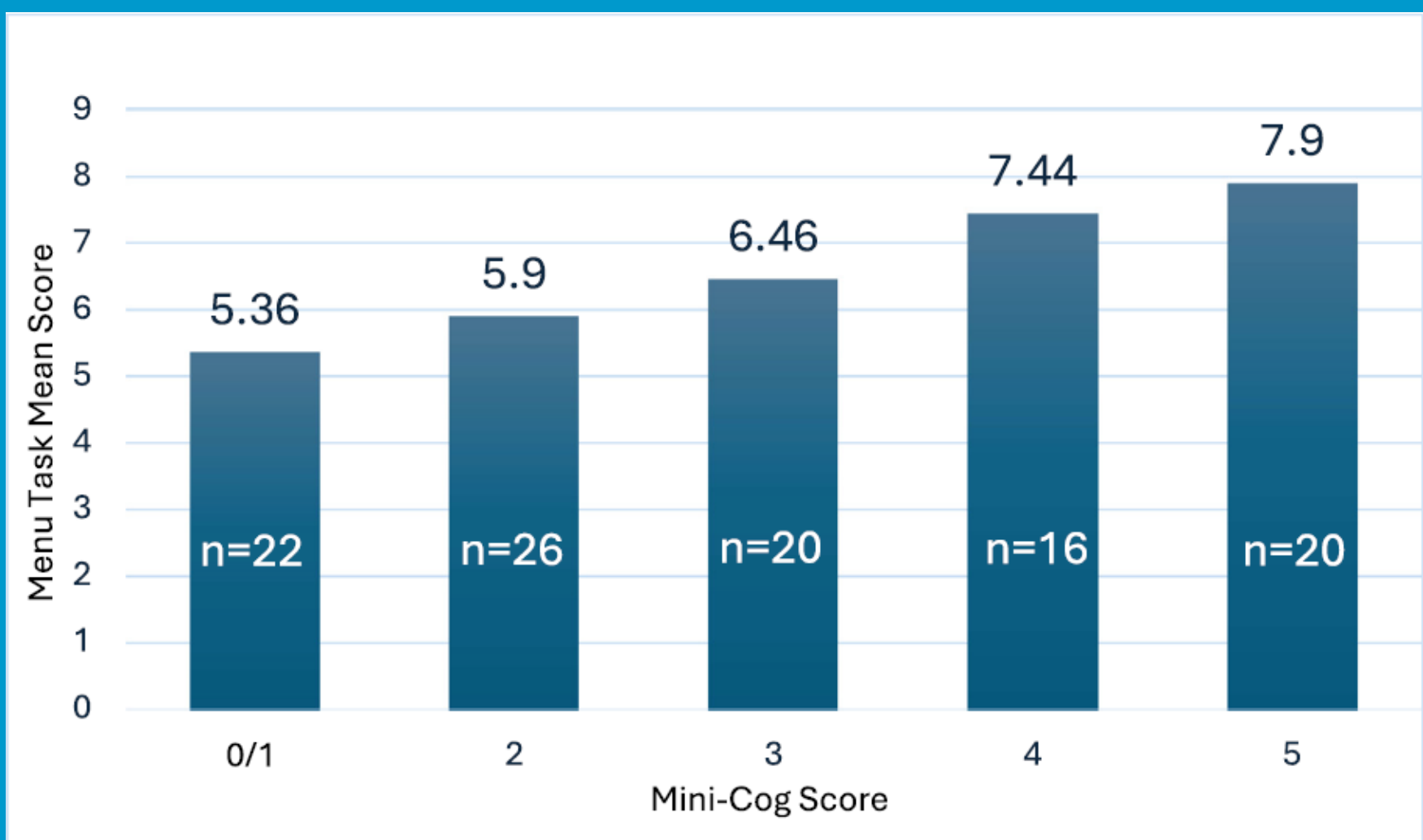


Fig 1 Mean scores in the Menu Task by the Mini-Cog Score.

Conclusions

- The Menu Task can be administered rapidly (average 8 min) by practicing occupational therapists in an acute hospital setting and is more sensitive to impairment than the Mini-Cog
- Provides preliminary evidence of sensitivity to functional cognitive deficits in acutely hospitalized populations, adding distinct information beyond basic mobility and self-care data
- The Menu Task is currently being validated for different geographical regions and cultural populations

References:

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3. Lee, Y., Randolph, S. B., Kim, M. Y., Foster, E. R., Kersey, J., Baum, C., & Connor, L. T. (2025). Performance-based assessments of functional cognition in adults, part 1-assessment characteristics: A systematic review. *The American Journal of Occupational Therapy: Official Publication of the American Occupational Therapy Association*, 79(4), 7904205130. <https://doi.org/10.5014/ajot.2025.050948>
4. Al-Heizan, M. O., Marks, T. S., Giles, G. M., & Edwards, D. F. (2022). Further validation of the Menu Task: Functional cognition screening for older adults. *OTJR: Occupation, Participation and Health*, 42(4), 286–294. <https://doi.org/10.1177/15394492221110546>