

# LECTURE 7

## Assessing the Client

- **Assessing the client**
- **Fitness testing**
- **The “Bleep” test**
- **Types of test**
- **PARQ form**

# Assessing the Client

Now I know that in terms of getting to know the client, you will have been assessing them from the moment you first meet them – what sort of person are they, how old they are, do they seem full of energy, are they happy and jolly or quiet and depressed, what's their general state of health, how motivated are they – and so on. But now you need more specific details from them. It doesn't mean giving them an exam to sit or an essay to write but you do have to ask them some fairly searching questions.

One of the things you need to give them is a questionnaire to fill in and sign. This is for their own protection but also for yours. The last thing that you want is the client falling down foaming at the mouth in the middle of your session and then taking you to court when they've recovered because you didn't take their previous medical condition into account!

The questionnaire you'll hear about most often is called a PARQ or PAR-Q, which stands for **Physical Activity Readiness Questionnaire**. The original PAR-Q was developed by the Canadian Society for Exercise Physiology (CSEP) and consists of seven medical questions, mainly concerned with diseases which could be aggravated by doing exercise, such as cardiovascular disease. But soon after that, exercise professionals felt that this didn't go far enough so they created other, additional questionnaires such as a "Life-Style Questionnaire", a "Risk Stratification Questionnaire", a "General Health Questionnaire" and even a "Chronic Medical Condition Questionnaire". If you gave all that lot to a client, they'd probably spend their first couple of sessions filling in forms rather than doing what they think they've paid for: doing some exercise!

So generally speaking, most personal trainers use a questionnaire which combines the original seven questions with other questions which they think are relevant when assessing clients and deciding on suitable programmes of exercise for them.

Here are the seven original PAR-Q questions from the CSEP:

1. Has your doctor ever said that you have a heart condition and that you should only do physical activity recommended by a doctor?
2. Do you feel pain in your chest when you do physical activity?

3. In the past month, have you had chest pain while you were NOT doing physical activity?
4. Do you lose your balance because of dizziness or do you ever lose consciousness?
5. Do you have a bone or joint problem that could be made worse by physical activity?
6. Is your doctor currently prescribing drugs for your blood pressure or heart condition?
7. Do you know of any other reason why you should not do physical activity?

But today, personal trainers often add others, such as asking about:

- The level of the client's physical activity generally (how much sitting down do they do during the day)
- Alcohol consumption
- Smoking habits
- Stress levels
- Diet – do they eat five portions of fruit and vegetables a day
- Sleep pattern – do they get 7-8 hours sleep a night
- Medical conditions
- Previous illnesses not included in the seven PARQ questions above

They also often take some measurements such as the client's

- Heart rate
- Blood pressure
- Lung function (peak flow)
- Waist-hip ratio
- Weight (BMI)
- Flexibility

At the end of the lecture there is an example of a PARQ but **it is not set in stone**. A PARQ needs to be relevant to the client and the situation. For example, if you are working with an older client, a balance test might be useful because balance deteriorates as we age. Or if a client is physically disabled, testing their range of movement would provide you with valuable information. Whereas if you are training a serious athlete, a detailed fitness test (such as a bleep test) could be valuable as a starting point.

In other words, make sure your Health Screening Questionnaire is APPROPRIATE.

But a questionnaire like this is not just useful to you, the trainer. It is useful for the client too because often it brings them face to face with uncomfortable facts that they have been hiding from. Clients may often tell you that they live a healthy lifestyle, but the questionnaire reveals that they drink a bottle of wine a night, have takeaways three times a week, sit at their desk all day for five days out of seven and get five hours sleep at night.

**A word of warning.** It is very tempting, if the questionnaire reveals negative things such as I've just described, to give them a lecture and offer advice on how they need to change their ways. **This will do no good.** What it does do more often than not, is to make them feel bad about themselves and even decide to go home, give up and reach for the biscuit tin. And what's more, they'll hate you! You have to take a gentler and more subtle approach – which we'll come to in a while.

# Fitness Testing

The next stage in getting to know your client, is to put them through what are commonly referred to as “fitness tests”. Often, the client will enjoy these as it involves them actually doing something (which is what they've come to you for) but also, they might be intrigued to find out whether they can actually do the things you're asking them to do. It represents a challenge. However, as I've already discussed, they have to be appropriate to the client's age, circumstances and fitness level otherwise they'll quickly want to give up and go home. Your ideology, and core principles need to match your training practices.

We're now going to explore the application and range of fitness tests you could offer a client.

Although we're going to use the word “test” for the rest of this section, the term “assess” is a better choice of word. We are **assessing** the client's current health and fitness levels as opposed to **testing** to see if they pass.

So after your initial consultation with a client, you might decide that it is appropriate to use one or more of the tests that you will find in the next lecture. On the other hand, it might be more suitable to do a simple movement screening assessment or simply devise an easy first training session and see how the client gets on. It all depends on the client in front of you.

If you work for a gym or fitness facility they will more often than not have a protocol for new clients but if you are self employed, you need to think wisely with every new client.

Remember, if you are not testing, you are guessing.

However, just as negative is over-testing or assessing as part of a tick-box exercise that has no further relevance or impact on training choice and programme selection.

Please see Lecture 8 for an extended copy of potential tests and the testing protocol.

Crucially you need to have knowledge and understanding of the tests you intend to use to ensure the relevance to your client's needs. Do you know why you are testing your client? How will the data / results be used to influence the workout / training programme? Does your client understand and know why they are being tested as well as the purpose and relevance of the test?

Simply going through a regime of tests because you think you should, will actually cause more harm and negatively influence your client's motivation.

If a client is clearly overweight, what good is making them stand on a scale? Can you find another way of obtaining basic data – maybe something the client hasn't done before which will change their attitudes and thoughts towards training and exercise? Rather than standing on scales, would a review of clothing sizes or a particular non-intrusive girth measurement be better? Or a low intensity fitness test – for example, in three minutes, how many steps up and down can you achieve on a low-level step? Using some pre thought, empathy and consideration for your client will gain their confidence and enhance your professionalism.

If the data or results of a test will not directly influence your programming decisions do not do the test. On the other hand, if you improve your knowledge and understanding of the test, you may adapt it or create your own. Let's take a look at this now.

# The Bleep Test

We'll take the most basic and well-known test – the bleep or Multi-Stage Fitness test. We're going to talk about this test to show how it is applied but also how you can add to it or adapt it to suit your particular client in order to gain the kind of information you require.

There are a couple of variations and standardisations of this test depending which version you use.

The objective of the Multi-Stage Fitness Test (MSFT or bleep test) is to monitor the development of an athlete's maximum oxygen uptake (VO<sub>2</sub> MAX).

This test has been traditionally considered appropriate for games players as it is specific to the nature of team-games sport because you have to keep running for a short distance and then turning. However, recent research has questioned the validity of this assumption because running continuously at a progressive rate does not occur in all sports: golf or cycling for example.

The bleep test involves continuous running between two lines 20m apart, in time to recorded "bleeps". The time between recorded bleeps decreases each minute. There are several versions of the test, but one commonly used version has an initial running speed of 8.5 km/hr, which increases by 0.5 km/hr each minute.

The higher level you attain, the fitter you are. In order to see exactly how fit you are, you use "standardised normative data".

**Normative data** is an agreed, published set of categories which enable you to cross-reference the results of your client in order to see how well they've done. The results can be plotted giving the participant an indicator to how well they have performed with respect to their age, gender and other standardised criteria compared with the average population. Some results of clients you test may not appear on the normative data scale if their results are too low or too high. This is something you should consider before you give a client the test. No one wants to think they are so bad that they're "off the scale"!

The bleep test has been used extensively for the past 50 years or more. It has a range of variables that can influence the end result. For example, the day and time of testing, whether it's indoors or outdoors. Also, there are individual internal variables such as the participant's quality of diet, sleep and recent stress levels.

You could also use such a test to gather more information about the client. For example, if you take their resting heart rate before the test and then afterwards, measure how long it takes to return to normal, this would give you far more information about their general level of fitness. You can use adaptations like this with other tests to give you a broader picture of your client's health.

# Types of Test

As you study for this diploma, you are likely to come across terms such as “health-related tests”, “fitness tests” and “skill-related tests”.

Before you start your first session with a client, we would recommend that you give particular health-related tests such as blood pressure and/or resting heart rate. These are appropriate to ensure that a client’s current health is appropriate prior to commencing training.

There are also others which might be appropriate, again according to what you think the client needs. Others that might be useful are:

Peak Flow Test,

Waist to hip ratio

Body Mass Index (BMI)

Please see Lecture 8 for the full details of these and how to apply them (known as the “testing protocol”)

Every test has its positives and negatives with regard to how you apply them. When selecting a test as part of the way you operate your business, you need to consider the space required, the cost of equipment, the time that the test takes to complete, the accuracy and reliability and crucially, how valid it is.

And once again, let us repeat: you don’t have to do them all in the first session – space them out according to what you want to measure.

The table below lists the components of fitness in Column One matched to the relevant tests in Column Two. These are simply a small selection. Please see Lecture 8 for full details of how to apply them and what the Normative Data for them is:

Strength	1. One Rep Max Test 2. Hand Grip Test – (This is linked to overall health) 3. Back Strength Dynamometer
Muscular Endurance	1. Press up test 2. Sit up test Harvard Step Test
Aerobic Endurance	1. Treadmill VO2 Max Test 2. Wingate Test Multistage Fitness Test
Explosive Muscular Power	Vertical Jump Test
Speed	35m Sprint test. (Vary the distance for validity.)
Flexibility	1. Sit & Reach 2. Shoulder Flexibility Test 3. Static Flexibility tests
Agility & Coordination	1. Illinois Agility Run 2. Coordination Test 3. Ruler Drop Test 4. Balance Stork Test

There is a popularity amongst trainers to use movement-screening tests. This is often used at a higher level than Level 3 which is the course you are on but this may be an avenue you would like to review and consider.

Our advice to any personal trainer is that the list of physical testing is vast. There are positives and drawbacks to all and they're dependent on their application and usage.

Because the practice of testing is continually evolving, we recommend you keep an open mind to the means of testing and assessing. Continue to review reliable sources when evaluating their application.



**Example of a**  
**PARQ form**

# Pre Activity Readiness Questionnaire Form (PAR-Q-Form)

## Personal Details

Title	Forename	Surname
Date of Birth	DD MM YYYY	Age Male/Female *delete as appropriate
Address		
Town	County	Postcode
Email		
Tel Home		Tel Mobile
Emergency Contact	Tel	

## Medical Questions

Answer the following questions as honestly as you can and provide as much relevant additional information. Answer the following questions by placing a tick in either the **Yes** or **No** boxes ( if you should answer **Yes** to any of the questions please provide further information in the space provided)

Do you currently or have you ever suffered from any of the following conditions?

1) Heart problems?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>	If <b>yes</b> , please provide details below
2) Circulatory problems?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>	
3) Blood pressure problems?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>	
4) Joint, movement problems?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>	
5) Feel dizzy or imbalance during exercise?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>	
6) Currently pregnant or recently given birth?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>	

## Health History

Do you currently receive medical care or do any of the following affect you?

7) Back/spinal pain?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>	If <b>yes</b> , please provide details below
8) Headaches or migraines?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>	
9) Have you recently had surgery?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>	
10) Currently being prescribed medication?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>	
11) Recently finished a course of medication?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>	
12) Diabetes?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>	
13) Asthma or breathing problems?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>	

Is there is any other reason that you believe may prevent you from taking part in any regular activity?

### Declaration

I have answered all question in this form honestly and I am aware that if I have answered **yes** to any of the questions I will need to consult my GP before commencing an exercise program if I am affected by any of the questions mentioned in this form or at a later date I agree to inform my personal trainer or instructor on any changes in health or fitness.

Signed:	Print Name:	Date: ____ / ____ /20 ____
Instructor:	Print Name:	Date: ____ / ____ /20 ____



## Pre Activity Readiness Questionnaire Form (PAR-Q-Form)

# Pre Activity Readiness Questionnaire & Health History Action Required for YES Responses

### What is the PARQ and why do I need to complete it?

The PARQ (Pre Activity Readiness Questionnaire) is an industry-standard for fitness professionals and fitness faculties to use when screening clients for exercise.

The reason for doing this is to ensure you (the client) is healthy and will not be put at risk from taking part in a fitness programme or regular exercise.

Fitness professionals are not medical professionals and cannot commence a fitness programme with a client who has provided positive responses to a PARQ. In this case, the client will be referred to their local GP to ensure they are ready for exercise.

A yes to the first 6 questions on the PARQ form overleaf will normally result in a referral to your GP however a YES response to questions 7 to 13 depending on the circumstances of each question will not normally require GP consent.

**The guide below is our policy and we must enforce on all occasions with no exceptions.**

### Action Required for YES Responses to PAR-Q Questions

- 1) *Heart problems?* **Refer to GP**
- 2) *Circulatory problems?* **Refer to GP**
- 3) *Blood pressure problems?* **Check blood pressure**
  - o If blood pressure is lower than 160/95 mmHg no referral is necessary
  - o If blood pressure is between 140/90 and 160/95 induct on CV only (Advice to see Doctor)
  - o If blood pressure is between 160/95 and 180/100 accept on GP referral only
  - o If blood pressure is 180/100 or higher will not be accepted
- 4) *Joint, movement problems?* **Refer to GP**
- 5) *Feel dizzy or imbalance during exercise?* **Refer to GP**
- 6) *Currently pregnant or recently given birth?* **Ask more questions about pregnancy/birth:**
  - o If pregnant and after the first three months, no referral is necessary
  - o If pregnant, within the first three months and was exercising regularly before became pregnant, no referral is necessary
  - o If pregnant within the first three months and not already exercising regularly, refer to GP
  - o If had a natural birth less than 6 weeks ago refer to GP
  - o If had caesarean section less than 10 weeks ago refer to GP

### Action Required for YES Responses to Health History Questions

- 7) *Back/spinal pain?* Find out limiting factors, i.e. movement and pain. If in doubt refer to GP
- 8) *Headaches or migraines?* Be aware that people who suffer from headaches on a regular basis may develop a headache caused by exercise while exercising.
- 9) *Have you recently had surgery?* Find out how recent surgery was and what it was if very recent refer to GP.
- 10) *Currently being prescribed medication?* Find out more information about the medicine and possible side effects, if in doubt refer to GP
- 11) *Recently finished a course of medication?* Find out about medication that was taken, if in doubt refer to GP
- 12) *Diabetes?* Not a limiting factor but will need to be aware of the condition, encourage them to carry a snack and ideally, they should take their blood sugar level before and after exercise. Best not to exercise if their level is too low or too high immediately before exercising. Ensure the client drinks plenty of water before, during and after exercise. If in doubt, refer to GP.
- 13) *Asthma or breathing problems?* If the inhaler is required, ensure they have it with them and re-schedule induction if they don't.