Assessing Activities of Daily Living (ADLs), Instrumental Activities of Daily Living (IADLs), and Functional Status

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Activities of Daily Living (ADLs) include basic skills that a person uses to manage their daily needs to live independently. ADLs refer to the following categories: grooming/personal hygiene, dressing, toileting, continence (bladder and bowel function), ambulating, and feeding (Edemekong et al., 2022). Mlinac and Feng (2016) pointed out that these skills are learned in early childhood and seem to stay more preserved than higher-level tasks as cognitive functioning declines in the older population. However, the inability to accomplish these essential skills can lead to unsafe conditions, poor quality of life, and dependence on others (Edemekong et al., 2022). Being able to measure ADLs is useful so that decisions can be made for alternative living arrangements or use of attendants in the home if an individual requires assistance. In many settings, ADLs are assessed by nurses or other medical health professionals, physical therapists, occupational therapists, and speech therapists (Mlinac & Feng, 2016).

One of the most frequently used checklists for ADLs is the Katz Index of Activities of Daily Living. The Katz scale assesses basic ADLS by scoring 1 point for independent activities and 0 points for dependent activities (Shelkey & Wallace, 2001). A summary score ranges from 0 (low function, dependent) to 6 (high function, independent). It is reported to be limited to measure small increments of change during the rehabilitation of older adults (Edemekong et al., 2022). However, it is useful to plan patient care and discharge planning.

Additionally, Instrumental Activities of Daily Living (IADLs) include more complex activities that require organizational skills and are related to the ability to live independently in the community. IADLs include categories such as managing finances and medications, food preparation, housekeeping, and laundry. One of the most frequently used checklists to measure IADLs is the Lawton Instrumental Activities of Daily Living (IADL) Scale (Edemekong et al., 2022). This instrument is most useful to identify how a person is functioning and can identify improvement or deterioration over time (Edemekong et al., 2022). The scale measures eight domains including food preparation, housekeeping, performing laundry, using

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the telephone, shopping, transportation, responsible for medications and managing finances (Graf, 2008). A summary score ranges from 0 (low function, dependent) to 8 (high function, independent). Individuals are scored according to their highest level of functioning. It is cautioned, however, if self-administered, it may lead to over-estimation or under-estimation of the ability to perform the activity (Edemekong et al., 2022).

The Functional Independence Measure (FIM) is an assessment tool that evaluates the functional status of individuals throughout a rehabilitation process typically following a stroke, traumatic brain injury, spinal cord injury, medical illness, etc (UB Foundation Activities, Inc., 2012). A FIM is an 18-item scale that measures function in six areas: self-care, continence, mobility, transfers, communication, and cognition. Each of the 18 items is graded on a scale of 1-7, depending on the level of independence of each item (Iwanenko et al., 2001). FIM is usually administered on admission and discharge as a data collection tool to compare the rehabilitation process over the course of a hospital program and follow- up. An updated inpatient assessment instrument with FIM tool can be found at https://www.cms.gov/files/document/irf-pai-version-40-eff-10012022-final.pdf

In addition, the Functional Assessment Measure (FAM) is used as a tool for the individual's communication, psychosocial adjustment, and cognitive functioning. It is a 7-point rating scale similar to the FIM to assess an individual's level of independence, assistance required, and use of adaptive or assistive devices. The FAM added 12 items to the FIM, which contains 18 items. The FAM provides additional data for populations such as traumatic brain injury and stroke. The abilities are rated on an ordinal scale that reflects a "better than" or "worse than" relationship and although numbers are assigned, it is cautioned that the numbers may not represent equal distances (Wright, 2000). A FAM Decision Tree can guide raters by asking a series of questions for each item to improve reliability. A sample of a FAM Decision Tree can be found at https://www.tbims.org/FAM/dectree.pdf

Also, Hopman-Rock et al. (2019) reported that the SMAF (Functional Autonomy Measurement System) had good ratings in validity, reliability, and responsiveness. It is a 29-item scale based on the World Health Organization classification of disabilities (Hebert et al., 1988). The SMAF measures ability in five categories: ADLs (7 items- eating, washing, dressing, grooming, urinary continence, fecal continence, and using the bathroom), mobility (6 items), communication (3 items), mental functions (5 items) and IADLs (8 items) (Hopman-Rock et al., 2019). Each item is scored on a 4-point scale from 0 (independent) to 3 (dependent) with a maximum score of 87. The SMAF must be administered by a trained health professional that obtains the information by questioning the individual or by observing.

Table 1

Definitions of Activities of Daily Living (ADLs)

Term	Definition
Ambulating/Transferring/ Mobility	Ability to move from one position to another and walk independently; to move about both inside and outside of one's home; includes walking, going up and down stairs, getting out of bed and into a wheelchair, and standing from a seated position to use a walker
Feeding	Ability of a person to feed oneself utilizing a fork or other utensils to get food to the mouth; the physical act of eating
Dressing	Ability to select appropriate clothes and to put on clothes; includes fastening buttons and zipping zippers
Grooming/Personal Hygiene	Ability to bathe and safely get out of the bathtub or shower; perform grooming activities such as shaving, nail care, and brushing teeth
Continence	Ability to control bladder and bowel function.
Toileting	Ability to get to and from the toilet, get on and off of the toilet, use it appropriately, and cleanse oneself.

Table 2

Definitions of Instrumental Activities of Daily Living (IADLs)

Term	Definition
Transportation	Ability to attend events, manage transportation, either via driving or by organizing other means of transport such as public transportation, taxis, and arranging rides with family members/friends
Managing Finances	Ability to pay bills and manage bank accounts/financial assets

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Table 2 – continued from previous page

Term	Definition
Shopping and Meal Preparation	Includes everything that is required to get a meal on the table including planning the meal, getting the necessary ingredients, and cooking; also shopping to buy essentials such as groceries, prescription medications, and clothes, clothing and other items required for daily life.
Housecleaning and Home Maintenance	Cleaning kitchen after eating, maintaining living areas reasonably clean and tidy, free of trash, performing laundry, and keeping up with home maintenance
Managing Communication with Others	Ability to look up phone numbers and use the telephone, manage mail, and communicate via a computer
Managing Medications	Ability to obtain medications, get prescriptions filled, and take meds as directed

Table 3

Definitions of Levels of Assistance

Term	Definition
Dependence Level 1: Total Assistance	An individual contributes less than 25% of the effort required or cannot help at all and requires total assistance to complete the task; another person(s) or assistive device(s) used
Dependence Level 2: Maximal Assistance	Assisting person(s) or device(s) required to perform approximately 75% of the work while the individual performs at least 25% up to 49% of the work
Dependence Level 3: Moderate Assistance	Assisting person(s) or device(s) required to perform approximately 25% of the work while the individual performs 50% to 75% of the work; requires more than touching.

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Term	Definition
Dependence Level 4: Minimal Assistance (Contact Guard Assist)	Assisting person has one or two hands on the individual's body but provides no other assistance to perform the task; contact is made to help steady the individual's body or to help with balance; individual is able to perform 75% or more of the work
Dependence Level 5: Supervision (Stand-by Assist or Setup)	Assisting person does not touch the individual or provide any assistance, but needs to be close by for safety in case the individual loses their balance or needs help to maintain safety during the task; may need verbal prompting (cueing or coaxing) without physical contact; helper may need to set up needed items.
Independence Level 6: Modified Independence	Needs assistance of an aid but requires no help to operate it, although there are risk considerations.
Independence Level 7: Complete Independence	Individual can perform the functional task with no help and is safe during the task without modification, assistive devices, or aids and within reasonable time

Table 4

FIM Abilities with Detailed Activities
Note: Adapted from The FIM Instrument by UB Foundation Activities, Inc., 2012. Functions are scored as Independent (7 Complete Independence; 6 Modified Independence); Dependent (5 Supervision or Set up; 4 Minimal Contact Assistance; 3 Moderate Assistance); Complete Dependence (2 Maximal Assistance; 1 Total Assistance).

FIM Category	Detailed Activities
Eating/Feeding	Picking up a utensil; using suitable utensils; scooping food onto a utensil; bringing food to the mouth; drinking from a cup or a glass; chewing and swallowing; managing a variety of food inconsistencies
Grooming	Oral care; hair grooming (combing or brushing); washing hands; washing the face; shaving the face or applying makeup

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FIM Category	Detailed Activities
Bathing (& Drying)	Ability to bathe self, including washing, rinsing, and drying self
Dressing Upper Body	Ability to dress and undress above the waist including fasteners; applying and removing a prosthesis or orthotic
Dressing Lower Body	Ability to dress and undress below the waist including fasteners; applying and removing a prosthesis or orthotic
Toileting	Includes maintaining perineal hygiene and adjusting clothing before and after using toilet
Bladder Management	Intentional control of urinary bladder, and if needed, use of equipment or agents for bladder control; two function modifiers: level of assistance; frequency of accidents
Bowel Management	Intentional control of bowels, and if needed, use of equipment or agents for bowel control; two function modifiers: level of assistance; frequency of accidents
Bed, Chair, Wheelchair Transfer	Includes all aspects of transferring from bed to a chair or a wheelchair, or coming to a standing position; if in a wheelchair, approaches a bed or chair, locks brakes, lifts foot rests, removes arms rests, if needed, and performs either a standing pivot or sliding transfer (without board) and returns safely
Toilet Transfer	Getting on and off a toilet
Tub and Shower Transfer	Getting in and out of a tub or shower
Walking/Wheelchair Locomotion	Walking on a level surface once in a standing position; using a wheelchair on a level surface once in a seated position
Stairs	Ascend and descend one flight of stairs

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FIM Category	Detailed Activities
Comprehension	Understand auditory or visual communication or both. Basic- pain, hunger, etc.; complex – current events, finances; writing; sign language; gestures
Expression	Includes clear vocal and/or non-vocal expression of language; ability to express needs & desires
Social Interaction	Cooperates, gets along with staff, family & others
Problem Solving	Initiating, sequencing, and self-correcting activities to solve problems; making reasonable, safe and timely decisions regarding financial, social, and personal affairs; recognizing a problem; making appropriate decisions; initiating steps and readjusting to changing circumstances; carrying out a sequence of steps; evaluating results; complex problems; managing a checkbook; making employment decisions; routine problems; completion of daily tasks; dealing with unplanned events or hazards that occur during the daily activities;
Memory	Recognizing people frequently encountered; remembering daily routines; executing requests without being reminded

Note: *Adapted from The FIM Instrument by UB Foundation Activities, Inc., 2012. Functions are scored as Independent (7 Complete Independence; 6 Modified Independence); Dependent (5 Supervision or Set up; 4 Minimal Contact Assistance; 3 Moderate Assistance); Complete Dependence (2 Maximal Assistance; 1 Total Assistance).*

Table 5

FAM Abilities with Dependence/Independence Levels

FAM Category	Activities
SWALLOWING	Ability to safely eat a regular diet by mouth
NO HELPER: **7 Complete Independence** – able to eat a in a reasonable period of time **6 Modified Independence** – May require excessive time for eating, assistive devices, or multiple swallows to clear food	**HELPER:** **5 Supervision** – may need modified diet, cueing, coaxing, or assistance with food choices **4 Minimal Assistance** – may require diet restrictions, monitor speed and amount of food intake; performs 75% of the activity **3 Moderate Assistance** - may require diet restrictions and modifications; may require moderate assistance to monitor speed and amount of food intake; performs 50-74% of the activity **2 Maximal Assistance (Dependent)** – unable to receive adequate nourishment via oral feedings; tube feedings provide primary nutrition; performs 25-49% of the activity **1 Total Assistance** – unable to take anything by mouth; nutrition provided via tube feedings

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FAM Category	Activities
CAR TRANSFER **NO HELPER:** **7 Complete Independence** – Complete without assistive devices, or aids, and within a reasonable amount of time **6 Modified Independence** – requires assistive device or aid, requires more time or there is a safety risk	Approach the car, manage the car door and lock, get on or off the car seat and manage the seat belt; if wheelchair is used, load and unload the wheelchair **HELPER:** **5 Supervision** – requires cueing, but no physical assistance to complete activity **4 Minimal Assistance** – performs at least 75% of the activity with some contact assistance **3 Moderate Assistance**- performs 50-75% of activity but requires assistance **2 Maximal Assistance (Dependent)** – performs 25-49% of the activity but requires heavy assistance **1 Total Assistance** - performs less than 25% of the activity and requires heavy assistance

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FAM Category	Activities
COMMUNITY ACCESS **NO HELPER:** **7 Complete Independence** – Use public transportation (bus, van, taxi) or able to drive a vehicle **6 Modified Independence** – Uses adaptive devices to drive, must keep trips short due to rest periods, or safety considerations	Ability to manage transportation including planning a route, time management, paying fares, and anticipating access barriers (excluding car transfers) **HELPER:** **5 Supervision** – requires cueing to use public transportation or ride in a vehicle **4 Minimal Assistance** – Able to use public transportation or ride in a vehicle, but needs some assistance; performs at least 75% of the activity without assistance **3 Moderate Assistance** - uses public transportation or rides in a vehicle performing 25-49% of activity without assistance **2 Maximal Assistance (Dependent)** – may use public transportation or ride in a vehicle but needs assistance for 50-75% of the activity **1 Total Assistance** – may use public transportation or ride in a vehicle but performs less than 25% of the activity with heavy assistance

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FAM Category	Activities
READING	Ability to understand non-vocal written material
NO HELPER: **7 Complete Independence** – Read and understand complex, lengthy paragraphs (newspapers, books, etc.) **6 Modified Independence** –Read and understand complex sentences or short paragraphs; may reduce speed or have retention problems	**HELPER:** **5 Standby Prompting** – able to read and understand short, simple sentences but shows increased difficulty with length or complexity **4 Minimal Prompting** – able to recognize single words and familiar short phrases **3 Moderate Prompting** - able to recognize letters, objects, forms, etc; able to match words to picture (50-75% accuracy) **2 Maximal Prompting** – able to match identical objects, forms, letters (25-49% accuracy) but may require cues **1 Total Assistance** – Unable to consistently match or recognize identical letters, objects, or forms (under 25% accuracy)

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FAM Category	Activities
WRITING	Includes spelling, grammar, and completeness of written communication
NO HELPER:	**HELPER:**
7 Complete Independence – able to write with accuracy in spelling, grammar, syntax, punctuation, and completeness	**5 Standby Prompting** – able to write phrases or simple sentences; may show spelling, grammar, or syntax errors
6 Modified Independence – able to accurately write sentences and form short paragraphs; may have occasional spelling or grammatical errors	**4 Minimal Prompting** – able to write simple words, occasional phrases to express ideas; spelling errors and reduced legibility are evident
	3 Moderate Prompting - able to write name (cueing may be required) and some familiar words; legibility is poor
	2 Maximal Prompting – able to write some letters spontaneously; able to trace or copy letters and numbers
	1 Total Assistance – Unable to copy letters or simple shapes

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FAM Category	Activities
SPEECH INTELLIGIBILITY	Includes articulation, rate, volume, and quality of vocal communication
NO HELPER: **7 Complete Independence** – able to converse with well articulated voice; no difficulty understanding what is being said **6 Modified Independence** – evidence of minor sound distortions but generally adequate intelligibility; speaking rate may be reduced	**HELPER:** **5 Standby Prompting** – speech intelligibility is always reduced; articulation consistently distorted; may attempt self-corrections **4 Minimal Prompting** – able to intelligibly produce single words and simple phrases; general conversation intelligibility **3 Moderate Prompting** - can produce single syllable words with adequate intelligibility; listener burden evident for sentences or longer verbalization **2 Maximal Prompting** – can produce vowels, some consonants; can't imitate some single words but productions may require listener guessing **1 Total Assistance** – No intelligible speech

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FAM Category	Activities
EMOTIONAL STATUS **NO HELPER:** **7 Complete Independence** – rarely exhibits depression, anxiety, frustration, lability and/or agitation; effectively able to control behavior reflecting self responsibility and involvement in general life functioning **6 Modified Independence** – may exhibit occasional but minimal depression, anxiety, frustration, lability and/or agitation; coping skills are adequate to keep distress within manageable limits; behavior does not interfere with general life functioning	Includes frequency and severity of depression, anxiety, frustration, ability, unresponsiveness, agitation, interference with general life functioning, ability to cope with and take responsibility for emotional behavior **HELPER:** **5 Supervision** – exhibits occasional and mild depression, anxiety, frustration, lability and/or agitation; has assumed responsibility for most behavior; learning to cope with condition; behavior does not significantly interfere with general life functioning **4 Minimal Direction** – exhibits frequent and moderate depression, anxiety, frustration, lability, and/or agitation; assumes responsibility for behavior; does not interfere with general life functioning 75% or more of the time **3 Moderate Direction** - exhibits frequent and moderate depression, anxiety, frustration, lability, and/or agitation; assumes responsibility for behavior; does not interfere with general life functioning 50 - 75% of the time **2 Maximal Direction** – exhibits constant and severe depression, anxiety, frustration, lability, and/or agitation; able to control behavior 25-49% of the time; interferes with general life functioning **1 Total Assistance** – exhibits constant and severe depression, anxiety, frustration, lability, unresponsiveness, and/or agitation; able to control behavior less than 25% of the time; continually interferes with general life functioning

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FAM Category	Activities
ADJUSTMENT TO LIMITATIONS	Includes denial/awareness, acceptance of limitations, willingness to learn new ways of functioning, compensating, taking safety precautions, and realistic expectations for long term recovery
NO HELPER:	
7 Complete Independence – ability to compensate for limitations as a result of disease or injury, safe judgment in ADLs and realistic expectations for long term recovery	**HELPER**:
	5 Supervision – difficulty coping with physical, emotional, and social limitations; beginning to compensate for some limitations; willing to learn new ways of functioning; may have unrealistic expectations for long term recovery
6 Modified Independence – some difficulty coping with physical, emotional or social limitations; does not interfere with general life functioning; compensates for most limitations; learned new ways of functioning; may have some unrealistic expectations for long term recovery but exercises safe judgment in ADLs most of the time	**4 Minimal Direction** – copes with limitations in general life functioning 75% or more; resists compensating for limitations and learning new ways of functioning
	3 Moderate Direction - may have awareness of physical, emotional, or social limitations; successful coping with limitations 50-75% of the time
	2 Maximal Direction – may have limited awareness of physical, emotional, or social limitations; successful coping with limitations 25-49% of the time
	1 Total Assistance – no awareness of physical, emotional, or social limitations; copes with limitations in general life functioning less than 25% of the time

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FAM Category	Activities
EMPLOYABILITY **NO HELPER:** **7 Complete Independence** – can compete in open market for wide range of jobs with existing skills; can initiate, plan, execute and assume responsibilities of homemaking; can understand and carry out school assignments and earn at least a C average **6 Modified Independence** can only compete in a limited job market due to disability; may have adjusted workload or require an assistive device; is able to do selected jobs competitively; maintain home and/or stay in school	Involvement in one or more of the following: in the work force, as a student, as a homemaker; retirement age or retired: potential for employment Sheltered workshop: Level 2, 3, or 4 due to physical, cognitive, and/or psychosocial disability **HELPER:** **5 Supervision** – requires re-training to develop necessary skills and requires supervision; may be some safety considerations; may require tutoring to pass courses **4 Minimal Assistance** – requires supervision and some assistance to get the job done or stay in school, e.g., special classes; could not compete in the job market **3 Moderate Assistance**- someone needs to be available at all times; cannot be left alone to do homemaking or function successfully in a school environment **2 Maximal Assistance** – cannot function effectively; unable to fulfill job, homemaker, or student responsibilities; requires maximum assistance on all tasks **1 Total Assistance** – not employable; not re-trainable at this time; cannot complete even the simplest tasks, even with maximum assistance; in a coma or totally dependent

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FAM Category	Activities
ORIENTATION	Includes consistent orientation to person, place, time, and situation
NO HELPER: **7 Complete Independence** – completely oriented to person, place, time, and situation 100% of the time without cues	**HELPER:** **5 Supervision** – requires cues from others; oriented to person, place, time, and situation
6 Modified Independence – may require more than a reasonable amount of time to respond; may use self-initiating or environmental cues, prompts, or aids; does not require the assistance of another person	**4 Minimal Prompting** – oriented to 3 out of 4 aspects and requires no external cues from others 75% or more of the time
	3 Moderate Prompting - oriented to 2 out of 4 aspects and requires no external cues from others 50-75% of the time
	2 Maximal – oriented to only 1 out of 4 aspects and requires no external cues from others 25-49% of the time
	1 Total Assistance – oriented to person, place, time, or situation less than 25% of the time

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FAM Category	Activities
ATTENTION **NO HELPER:** **7 Complete Independence** – able to attend continuously for 60 minutes without assistance **6 Modified Independence** – able to attend for 60 minutes without assistance but distractibility may delay completion of task	Length of time able to concentrate on a task taking into consideration distractibility, level of responsiveness, and the difficulty and length of task **HELPER:** **5 Supervision** – able to attend for 30-59 minutes but needs supervision to cope with effects of distractibility **4 Minimal Direction** – able to attend for 15-29 minutes but needs assistance to minimize distractibility; able to attend more than 75% of the time **3 Moderate Direction** - able to attend for 5-14 minutes but needs assistance to minimize distractibility; able to attend 50-75% of the time **2 Maximal Direction** – able to attend for 1-4 minutes to a task, but is frequently distracted; able to attend 25-49% of the time **1 Total Assistance** – not able to attend to a task for more than 1 minute and attends less than 25% of the time

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FAM Category	Activities
SAFETY JUDGMENT **NO HELPER:** **7 Complete Independence** – no impairment on any of the safety judgment related abilities and can be left alone indefinitely and/or can pursue all normal activities alone	Orientation to one's situation, awareness of one's deficits and their implications; ability to plan ahead; ability to understand the nature of situations involving potential danger and to identify risks involved; freedom from impulsivity; ability to remember safety related information; ability to respond appropriately if danger arises **HELPER:** **5 Supervision** – impairment in one or more activities that require supervision in the community
6 Modified Independence – can be left alone for an entire day but may need some supervision with new or complex activities; routine activities can be pursued independently	**4 Minimal Direction** – independent only within the hospital or other structured setting; needs no supervision in the setting once an activity is learned; needs close supervision by staff or trained family when leaving that setting; cannot be left alone in the home due to safety considerations **3 Moderate Direction** - needs supervision for safety in some unstructured hospital/community settings; cannot be left alone in the home **2 Maximal Direction** – needs supervision for safety in all settings; allowed off hospital ward only when accompanied by staff or trained family **1 Total Assistance** – requires close supervision (one on one supervision)

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