



Medical Assessment



Medical Assessment



Firefighters may be exposed to extreme physical and psychological demands in hostile and dangerous environments. To comply with relevant statutory provisions, the medical screening for Firefighters is rigorous. Under the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974, the Fire and Rescue Service must reduce risk so far as is reasonably practicable. This means a medical condition giving rise to reasonably foreseeable occupational risk would not be acceptable.

However, the nature and effect of medical conditions vary, and it is therefore not possible to confirm medical conditions that would be unacceptable prior to an individual medical assessment. If you have a medical condition or a history of a medical condition which might present problems, the following general guidance should help you consider your medical suitability and whether additional specialist information will be necessary at your medical assessment.

A medical condition or functional limitation which, despite any reasonable adjustments, gives rise to significantly increased occupational risk of the following is likely to be unacceptable:

- Sudden collapse or sudden incapacitation
- Impaired judgement or altered awareness
- Substantial physical or psychological injury/ill health
- Any other effect which would pose a substantial health and safety risk to yourself or others

During your assessment health professionals will examine your general health against the required standards and this will include a discussion about your completed medical questionnaire. Your health information is confidential to the occupational health and fitness team. In some cases, we may need to see further information from your GP.

The medical assessment will include the following:

- General health questionnaire - history of physical and mental health, (with additional respiratory questions for the Asbestos Regulations)
Measurement of pulse, blood pressure, height, weight and waist measurement
- Urinalysis
- Vision (both near and distance) plus colour vision
- Spirometry (lung capacity test)
- Audiometry (hearing test)
- Drug and Alcohol screening
- Cardiovascular fitness test - a treadmill test using a gas analyser to measure oxygen uptake
- General physical examination (e.g., cardiovascular, neurological, respiratory, musculoskeletal etc.)

Firefighter - eyesight requirements

If you have any doubts regarding your eyesight, we suggest that you book an appointment with your optician and make them aware of the required standards (these can be found in the FAQs).

Colour Blindness – If you believe you have colour blindness, it is suggested that you arrange a formal assessment prior to applying. You will be required to pass the Ishihara test at your medical assessment and if this is not possible, the minimum standard accepted is the Farnsworth D-15 standard test. In addition, we also conduct functional tests as part of the process if there are difficulties with colour perception before confirming fitness for role.

All cases are assessed on an individual basis and further information and advice can be sought from the occupational health and fitness team on

Occupational.Health@notts-fire.gov.uk



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FAQs

I struggle sometimes to hear things; will this be an issue?

Firefighters must not only communicate over the radio, but they must respond to shouted warnings, audible alarms and cries for help – all above the environmental noise at incidents. Therefore, they need to have a minimum hearing level to be considered 'fit for role', which would normally be H2 (military standards). Hearing aids are allowed on the fire ground, but a functional test would be required to ensure that the required standard was met.

I would like to become a firefighter but I wear glasses or have had laser eye surgery, is that a problem?

The Vision Standards for becoming a firefighter are as follows:

- Vision must be binocular. Monocularity will require additional assessment.
- Distance = visual acuity of 6/9 with both eyes together, aided if necessary. If you do wear aids (glasses or contacts), you are required to bring a copy of your prescription to your medical.
- Near vision = be able to read N12 at 30cm unaided with both eyes open.
- Have a normal visual field in each eye.
- Have no history of night blindness or any other ocular disease that is likely to progress and result in future failure of the visual standards for serving firefighters.
- Have an appropriate level of colour perception. The Ishihara Test will be used to test for colour perception. If this is not passed, a formal specialist assessment is required before a vocational colour vision test will be performed on the fireground.
- Have not undergone refractive surgery in the previous 12 months. Individuals who have had Radial Keratotomy cannot be considered for operational firefighting duties due to the relatively high incidence of refractive instability. Individuals who have undergone the following types of refractive surgery can be considered 12 months after surgery:
 - Photorefractive Keratectomy (PRK)
 - Laser assisted in-situ keratomileusis (LASIK)
 - Laser epithelial keratomileusis (LASEK)
- Soft contact lenses can be worn.
- Rigid (hard) lenses are not considered safe as debris can become trapped beneath these which can cause visual discomfort and disability.



Medical Assessment FAQs



What if I have asthma?

Asthma does not necessarily prevent you from becoming a firefighter. However, firefighters are exposed to smoke and other toxicants as part of their job, which are irritating to the lungs / upper respiratory tract and can exacerbate the symptoms of wheezing in firefighters with asthma. Your condition will be assessed at the medical stage, after which a decision will be made as to your suitability for the role of firefighter. This will include:

- Careful history that focuses on current symptoms and treatment requirements,
- Potential triggers including exercise and irritant exposures
- The frequency and history of exacerbations

What if I have had mental health issues?

Mental health issues can affect anyone and it is estimated that 1 in 6 people in the past week will have experienced a common mental health problem. Most individuals can manage these episodes with self-help strategies, counselling support or medication (in some cases) and can continue to cope well in their everyday activities. Having experienced such issues will not prevent you from applying to become a firefighter and all cases will be discussed confidentially with you during your medical assessment. If you have recently begun to have symptoms or started treatment, it could be that information will be required from your GP or Specialist to help during this assessment. Also, if you have a chronic mental health condition which requires ongoing treatment or input from a GP or specialist, we are likely to need medical reports to be able to offer an opinion on your fitness for firefighting.

If you are aware that any of the above could apply to you, please get in touch with us to discuss this further and we will be able to offer advice on any next steps to assist in the assessment process.

I am a diabetic. Can I still apply?

We will need a report from your Specialist Consultant detailing the following information to allow assessment of suitability and so that an individual risk assessment can be undertaken:

- Category of Diabetes (Type 1 or 2)
- Evidence of stability of control
- Evidence of blood sugar levels (HbA1c) over a recent 12-month period



Medical Assessment FAQs



What is the required fitness standard?

A minimum aerobic capacity score of 42.3ml/kg/min is required. Our method of assessment will involve a treadmill test where your oxygen uptake will be monitored using gas analysis equipment. It is also a requirement that this minimum level of fitness is maintained throughout a firefighter's career, which is assessed annually.

What if I have high blood pressure?

Prior to engaging in physical activities as part of the firefighter application process, we will take blood pressure readings to ensure that it is safe for someone to do so. If the readings on the day indicate Stage 2 hypertension (see below), we will not allow an individual to undertake the physical assessments and suggest that they discuss the results with their GP.

Whilst we realise that it is possible for people to have some fluctuations in their blood pressure readings dependent on many factors, we will not have the opportunity to schedule further readings during the application process. Therefore, if you are aware that you do have, or previously had high blood pressure, you should take steps to ensure that this is well managed before attending for physical assessments.

| BP Classification | Systolic | Diastolic |
|----------------------|----------|-----------|
| Normal | <120 | AND <80 |
| Pre hypertension | 120-139 | OR 80-89 |
| Stage 1 hypertension | 140-159 | OR 90-99 |
| Stage 2 hypertension | >160 | OR >100 |

What increases risk of developing high blood pressure?

There are various things that can cause an increase in blood pressure, including:

- Being overweight
- A diet high in salt
- Not eating enough fruit and vegetables
- Drinking too much alcohol or caffeine-based drinks i.e., coffee
- Not engaging in regular physical activity
- Smoking
- A family history of high blood pressure

Lifestyle changes for managing blood pressure

To prevent or reduce high blood pressure, there are various lifestyle changes you can adopt which can help to lower your blood pressure:

- If you are overweight, then weight loss can help
- Regular physical activity
- Reduce salt intake
- Moderation on alcohol intake

For more help and advice see:

<https://www.bhf.org.uk/information-support/heart-matters-magazine/research/blood-pressure/blood-pressure-tips>

To help us to measure your blood pressure accurately when you attend, please refrain from food, caffeine, tobacco and alcohol for 30 minutes before arrival.

If you have any questions or require further information, then please do not hesitate to contact the occupational health and fitness team in confidence.

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