Mild Cognitive Impairment (MCI) is a disorder of memory or other related cognitive process. A person with MCI experiences greater memory or other thinking difficulties than expected with aging, but the problems do not impair their ability to complete daily activities (as they do in diseases causing dementia). It is important to recognize MCI because it puts a person at a much greater risk of developing dementia in the future.

CAUSE
MCI has several potential causes. Sometimes MCI is the earliest symptom of Alzheimer’s disease. It can also be caused by other disorders. Often the cause becomes apparent over time.

SYMPTOMS
The most common type of MCI represents difficulties with memory (MCI – amnestic type). People with amnestic MCI have significant memory impairment. While smaller memory lapses are common as we get older, MCI type of memory loss is usually very noticeable to family and friends, and often to the person with the condition. Even though persons with MCI are forgetful, they are able to continue doing all their usual activities around their home and community.

Some people are diagnosed with other types of MCI, such as executive type (e.g., problem solving or decision making difficulties), language type (e.g., trouble naming common objects or communicating), or visual spatial type (e.g., difficulty with perceptual judgments).

DIAGNOSIS
A diagnosis of MCI is usually made after a thorough medical examination and neuropsychological testing (a detailed assessment of memory and thinking abilities). Brain scans and blood tests are often performed. A diagnosis is generally made on the basis of three criteria:

- an individual’s report of a significant decline of his/her own cognitive ability or as reported by a family member or close friend;
- measurable, greater than normal impairment detected by standard cognitive tests;
- intact orientation and ability to perform normal daily activities.

PROGNOSIS AND TREATMENT
Over time, persons with MCI may worsen and have difficulties with their usual activities that indicate they have developed dementia. However, others with MCI do not decline significantly, even after several years of memory loss or other cognitive difficulties. Unfortunately, there are few treatments available for MCI. An evaluation may identify conditions that are contributing to symptoms.
and suggest specific treatments that can lead to noticeable improvement. Researchers are in the process of testing several new treatments for MCI. Some physicians may prescribe a cholinesterase inhibitor drug used to treat Alzheimer’s disease (trade names Aricept, Exelon, or Reminyl), recommend additional specialized tests (e.g., a sleep study), or suggest a change in a person’s daily routine, (e.g., increasing exercise).

RESOURCES
More information about MCI can be found at:
www.alz.org
1-800-272-3900