

Mild Cognitive Impairment

What is a Mild Cognitive Impairment?

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

What are the causes of a Mild Cognitive Impairment?

The causes of MCI are not yet completely understood. Experts believe that many cases – but not all – result from brain changes occurring in the very early stages of Alzheimer’s disease or other dementias.

What are the symptoms of a Mild Cognitive Impairment?

Experts classify MCI based on the thinking skills affected:

Amnestic MCI

Amnestic MCI primarily affects memory. A person with Amnestic MCI may start to forget important information that they would have previously recalled easily, such as:

- Appointments
- Conversations
- Recent events

Nonamnestic MCI

Nonamnestic MCI affects thinking skills other than memory. Thinking skills that may be affected by nonamnestic MCI include:

- Making sound decisions

- Judging the time or sequence of steps needed to complete a complex task
- Visual perception

How is a Mild Cognitive Impairment diagnosed?

MCI is a clinical diagnosis representing a doctor's best professional judgment about the reason for a person's symptoms. If a physician has difficulty confirming a diagnosis of MCI or the cause of MCI, brain imaging and cerebrospinal fluid tests may be performed to determine if the individual has MCI due to Alzheimer's disease.

A medical exam for MCI includes:

- Thorough medical history
- Assessment of independent function and daily activities
- Input from a family member on function
- Assessment of mental status
- In-office neurological exam
- Evaluation of mood
- Laboratory tests

What are the prognosis and options for treatment?

There aren't currently medications to slow the decline that can occur with MCI. Drugs approved to treat symptoms of Alzheimer's disease may help those with MCI, but have not been shown to prevent progression of MCI to dementia.

Some studies suggest that the following may help slow decline:

- A healthy diet
- Exercise
- Participation in mentally stimulating and socially engaging activities

Where can I learn more?

More information about Mild Cognitive Impairment can be found at:

- The Alzheimer's Association
www.alz.org or by calling (800) 272-3900
- The National Institute on Aging
www.nia.nih.gov or by calling (800) 438-4380

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