

Mild cognitive impairment (MCI) is a condition in which people have more memory or thinking problems than other people their age. The symptoms of MCI are not as severe as those of Alzheimer's disease or a related dementia. People with MCI can usually take care of themselves and carry out their normal daily activities.

People with MCI are at a greater risk of developing Alzheimer's disease or a related dementia. Estimates vary as to how many people who have MCI will develop [dementia](#). Roughly one to two out of 10 people age 65 or older with MCI are estimated to develop dementia over a one-year period. However, in many cases, the symptoms of MCI stay the same or even improve.

If you have this condition, it's important to see a doctor or specialist regularly to help monitor changes in memory and thinking over time.

What Causes Mild Cognitive Impairment?

Many factors can cause problems with memory and thinking. There is no single cause of MCI, and it's more likely to occur as someone ages. Estimates vary, but roughly 10% to 20% of people over age 65 have MCI, with the risk increasing as someone gets older. Other factors like genetics and certain conditions — including diabetes, depression, and stroke — may affect a person's risk for MCI.

In some cases, memory and thinking problems may be caused by conditions that are treatable. For example, a bad reaction to medication, emotional problems, drinking too much alcohol, blood clots or tumors in the brain, or a head injury can all cause serious memory problems that can be resolved with treatment.



Can I Prevent Dementia?

We don't yet know for certain whether lifestyle and behavior changes can prevent dementia, but leading a healthy lifestyle may help.

[Learn about steps that may reduce your risk.](#)

What Are the Signs and Symptoms of Mild Cognitive Impairment?

Symptoms associated with MCI lie in the space between what are considered normal age-related changes and dementia. Signs of MCI include losing things often, forgetting to go to important events or appointments, and having more trouble coming up with words than other people of the same age. It's common for family and friends to notice these changes. Movement difficulties and problems with the sense of smell have also been linked to MCI.

Signs of Healthy Aging vs. Mild Cognitive Impairment vs. Dementia

The chart below highlights how mild cognitive impairment differs from the changes seen in healthy aging and dementia.*

	Healthy Aging	Mild Cognitive Impairment	Dementia
Sometimes forgetting which words to use	✓		
Losing things from time to time	✓		
Missing a monthly payment occasionally	✓		
Difficulty coming up with words		✓	
Losing things often		✓	✓
Forgetting to go to important events		✓	✓
Trouble having a conversation and/or reading and writing			✓
Asking the same question or repeating the same story over and over			✓
Difficulty with basic daily activities			✓
Problems handling money and paying bills			✓
Becoming lost in familiar places			✓
Hallucinations, delusions, and paranoia			✓

*This is not a complete list of all symptoms associated with these conditions, but it is designed to show how the symptoms differ.



How Is Mild Cognitive Impairment Diagnosed and Managed?

If you or a loved one is experiencing symptoms of MCI, discuss these with your doctor. Your doctor can perform medical tests and assessments to help determine whether the source of memory problems is something treatable or may be MCI. He or she may also suggest that you see someone who specializes in the diagnosis of memory disorders, such as a neurologist, psychiatrist, or neuropsychologist.

There is currently no treatment or medication for MCI, but there are things you can do that may help you stay healthy and manage changes in your thinking. Keeping your mind active is one thing that may benefit your brain. The following tips may help you feel better, and could help your memory:

- Follow a daily routine.
- Use memory tools such as calendars, to-do lists, and notes to yourself.
- Put commonly used objects in the same place each day.
- Learn a new skill.
- Volunteer in your community, at a school, or at your place of worship.
- Spend time with friends and family.
- Get enough sleep, generally seven to eight hours each night.
- Exercise and eat well.
- Don't drink a lot of alcohol.
- Get help if you feel depressed for weeks at a time.

People with MCI may worry that their memory problems will progress to Alzheimer's disease or a related dementia. Because MCI may be an early sign of a more serious memory problem, it's important to see your doctor every six to 12 months to track any changes in your memory and thinking skills over time.

If symptoms do progress to dementia, getting a diagnosis early can help you and your family prepare for the future. While there are no medications to stop or reverse Alzheimer's disease or

a related dementia, there are medicines that may help slow down certain symptoms, such as memory loss or behavioral problems.

What Can You Do?

If you are concerned about memory problems, talk with your doctor. If you or someone you know has recently been diagnosed with MCI, explore the resources on this website and referenced below to find out more about care, support, and research. The person with MCI may also consider participating in research by joining a clinical trial or study. Many studies are recruiting people with MCI to test early interventions that could slow or stop the progression of cognitive impairment.

