

What is Mild Cognitive Impairment?



Mild cognitive impairment (MCI) is a condition that causes memory problems and can also affect judgement, movement and smell. MCI leads to Alzheimer's disease in about 80% of cases.¹

If you notice the signs of MCI affecting you or a loved one, speak to a doctor to get a formal diagnosis and access to the right resources for your needs.

You Can Take Action

These steps can help you or a loved one recognize and respond to MCI:

Know the symptoms of MCI. Forgetfulness or occasional memory lapses are an ordinary part of aging, but MCI can cause unusually frequent or pronounced memory lapses, like forgetting appointments or recent events, losing objects, and struggling to remember words. MCI can also cause problems with decisions and judgment, visual perception, and sense of smell.

If it's happening to you, talk to a doctor. Your doctor can use thinking, memory, and language tests to find out whether your memory problems are caused by MCI. It may even be helpful to see a specialist, such as a neurologist, who may be more familiar with assessing MCI than a primary care doctor. They can also help you make a plan to introduce more brain-healthy behaviors into your daily life.

If it's happening to a loved one, talk to them. Discussing memory problems with a family member can seem difficult, but it could be very important to their brain health. To start, choose a comfortable time and place for the conversation, describe the changes you've noticed, and discuss seeing a doctor. We can

provide resources to help you prepare for the conversation.

Follow up and keep an eye on changes. After you or your loved one has spoken with your doctor, make sure to schedule a follow-up appointment for 6 months to 1 year later. Then, continue to watch for additional memory problems or other changes. If memory problems grow worse, or if you notice changes in behavior or daily activities, raise the issue with your doctor.

Take steps for brain health. People with MCI, like all older adults, can make daily changes to strengthen their brain health. Consider how you and your family can take advantage of a healthy diet, physical exercise, good sleep, social engagement, and management of chronic conditions like hypertension and diabetes.

1. <https://www.nia.nih.gov/health/what-mild-cognitive-impairment>
2. <https://www.nia.nih.gov/health/noticing-memory-problems-what-do-next>
3. https://www.alz.org/alzheimers-dementia/what-is-dementia/related_conditions/mild-cognitive-impairment
4. <https://www.alz.org/alzheimers-dementia/memory-loss-concerns>