

Learning About Mild Cognitive Impairment (MCI)



What is mild cognitive impairment (MCI)?

It's common to forget things sometimes as we get older. But some older people have memory loss that's more than normal aging. It's called mild cognitive impairment, or MCI. It is not the same as dementia.

People with the condition often know that their memory or mental function has changed. Tests may show some loss. But their minds work well overall. They can carry out daily tasks that are normal for them.

People with MCI have a higher chance of one day getting dementia. But not all people who have it will get dementia. Some people may stay the same over time.

What are the symptoms?

People with MCI have more memory loss than what occurs with normal aging. They may have increasing trouble with recalling words and keeping up with conversations. They may also have trouble remembering important events and making decisions.

What puts you at risk?

The risk of getting MCI increases with age. Having high blood pressure or having a family history of MCI may also increase your risk.

How is it diagnosed?

Your doctor will do a physical exam.

You may be asked questions to check your memory and other mental skills. Your doctor may also talk to close friends and family members. This can help the doctor figure out how your memory and other mental skills have changed.

You may get blood tests and tests that look at your brain.

These questions and tests can make sure you don't have other conditions that can cause symptoms like MCI. These include depression, sleep problems, and side effects from medicines.

How is it treated?

There are no medicines to treat MCI or to keep it from progressing to dementia. But treating conditions like high blood pressure and diabetes may help. A person with MCI needs routine follow-up visits with their doctor to check on changes in the person's mental skills.

How can you care for yourself at home?

Keeping your body active can help slow MCI. Exercises like walking can help. Try to stay active mentally too. Read or do things like crossword puzzles if you enjoy doing them.

If you need help coping with MCI, you may want to get support from family, friends, a support group, or a counselor who works with people who have MCI.

Though the future isn't always clear, it can be good to plan ahead with instructions for your care. These are called advanced directives. Having a plan can help make sure that you get the care you want.

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