

Mild Cognitive Impairment

Patient Information Leaflet

Shining a light on the future



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Introduction

The aim of this leaflet is to provide you with information about Mild Cognitive Impairment. If you are not sure about anything in this leaflet please ask a member of staff.

What is Mild Cognitive Impairment (MCI)?

If you have been told that you have Mild Cognitive Impairment (MCI) this means that your mental abilities (cognition) are not as good as they used to be. This usually refers to problems affecting memory, but could involve a change in problem solving, thinking, attention, concentration, language or visual ability.

MCI is more than just normal forgetting and means a difficulty that is greater than would be expected for normal ageing. **MCI is not the same as dementia.** People with MCI can be at risk of developing dementia in the future, but many do not develop more problems and a small number can recover.

What causes MCI?

There are many different reasons why people develop MCI. Often it can be difficult to identify the underlying cause. Your doctor may or may not be able to say what the underlying cause of your difficulties is.

What difficulties can be expected?

The difficulties that those with MCI experience can vary and depend on what part of your cognition is effected. The cognitive assessment that you completed will have helped highlight the strengths and weaknesses in your ability. Difficulties seen in MCI can include:

Memory

- Misplacing items
- Difficulty retaining information such as recalling phone messages or shopping lists
- Forgetting what you have done recently and events you have attended
- Forgetting what you are planning to do in the future such as remembering appointment dates
- Forgetting what you went into a room to collect
- Recalling the names of people or things
- Difficulty concentrating on tasks
- Losing track of what you wanted to say in conversation

Language

- Word finding difficulties – finding the right word you want to say in conversation
- Difficulty in describing objects or situations
- Being less fluent in conversation with others

Problem solving

- Difficulty with planning and problem solving in relation to carrying out tasks such as cooking, household chores, DIY tasks
- Being more distracted when carrying out tasks
- Difficulty adapting to changes in routine
- A change in judgement, personality or behaviour

Visual

- Experiencing more difficulty navigating and recalling directions
- Difficulty judging distances
- Difficulty coordinating tasks such as dressing

Other symptoms

- Low mood or depression can be commonly experienced
- Increased feelings of irritability or having more difficulty coping with stress
- Apathy - loss of enthusiasm for previously enjoyed activities
- Feelings can include sadness, anger, worry or frustration

What can I do to help with memory/cognitive difficulties?

There are many different coping strategies that can make life easier if you have noticed a change in memory.

Making changes to your environment

You can adapt your environment to help with memory difficulties, so that you do not need to rely on your memory as much.

- Use a notebook, calendar or diary, to help you remember things.
- Put a notebook by the phone to note down any phone calls and messages.
- Write important dates and appointments on a calendar.
- Decide on a special place to keep important items such as keys, or glasses. Make sure you put them back in the same place after using them, so you always know where to find them.
- Put information on a notice board.
- Use a pill box or weekly dispenser for tablets. These can be requested free of charge via your GP.

Following a set routine

Another way to make life easier is to follow a set routine. This can reduce any memory problems as you get used to what to expect, e.g. taking night time medication straight after cleaning teeth, or doing the weekly shopping every Tuesday.



Using memory aids

Memory aids can be very important. These can take over some tasks that your memory does and also reduce the number of things that you have to remember, which helps your memory work better. All memory aids work best if you can make them part of your routine.



- **Using a diary** – to record what you do on a daily basis and keep track of future appointments.
- **Notebook** – to write down information that you want to remember.
- **Calendar** – displayed in a prominent place can be a good way to note future appointments and social events. It is important to remember to check this each day.
- **Making lists of what to do** - e.g. shopping lists.
- **Notice board or dry wipe message board** – this is useful for leaving messages for family members and writing reminders to yourself. You could also record important phone numbers that you need to remember.
- **Sticky backed notes** – these can be left in places around the home to remind you to do things.
- **Alarm clocks, timers, mobile phones** - can be used as a prompt for activities such as taking food out of the oven.
- **A tape recorder or Dictaphone** - this can be useful to record anything you want to remember.
- **Getting a newspaper daily** - this can be a good prompt for the date.



Maintaining wellbeing

It is important to reduce any stress, anxiety or low mood as much as possible. These difficulties have a negative impact on memory and concentration and can worsen memory problems.

- Continue to lead an active life and maintain all the interests and activities that you enjoy - try not to stop doing any interests.
- If you notice that you are becoming low in mood or anxious, talk to family or close friends about your feelings.
- It can also be helpful to tell family and friends about what difficulties you are experiencing and how they can support you, such as providing prompts to help with memory.
- Try not to become concerned or embarrassed if you forget something.
- If you have difficulty finding the right word or piece of information, try not to worry about this or try too hard to remember. Once you stop trying it will often come back to you.
- Try to do one task at a time; tackling too many things at once can become confusing.
- Take your time - there is no need to hurry.
- Break up tasks into small steps to make them more manageable.



Can the 'memory medications' be used in MCI?

A number of studies completed have shown that using memory drugs for the treatment of MCI **do not** improve memory and will **not** prevent difficulties from getting worse. The side effects are more pronounced when used in MCI and include higher rates of nausea, diarrhoea and leg cramps. Therefore the memory drugs are not used in MCI.

Will my difficulties get any better?

For a few people with MCI, difficulties can get better if identified problems are due to physical health problems or anxiety/stress or low mood, and there is a subsequent improvement in well-being. But for the majority of people with MCI it is likely that problems will not get any better. However, problems may also remain stable. Some people with MCI can later experience a progression of their problems which might subsequently lead to a diagnosis of dementia. Of those with MCI, only 10-15% per year develop dementia. However it is not currently possible to predict which individual's with MCI will go on to develop a dementia.

How can someone have the best chance of avoiding dementia in the future?

Research has suggested that lifestyle can affect a person's risk of developing dementia. There are steps that can be taken to reduce risk:-

- Take regular exercise such as walking or swimming.
- Maintain the range of interests and activities that you previously enjoyed such as socialising with friends.
- "Keep the mind active" - doing crossword puzzles and word searches - as long as these are activities that you enjoy.
- Look after your health - stop smoking, refrain from exceeding the recommended amounts of alcohol, and avoid eating too many fatty foods.

What would be the signs that my problems are getting worse?

In the future should you feel that your memory/cognitive difficulties are getting worse, please discuss this with your GP who may re-refer you to the service. Possible signs of difficulties getting worse include:

- Cognitive problems getting significantly worse and occurring more often. It can also be helpful to check whether family or close friends have also noticed any changes.
- Noticing difficulties occurring in other areas of ability such as attention/concentration, problem solving, language or visual ability.
- Noticing a change in your ability in everyday life to do tasks such as cooking, shopping, household chores.
- It is also worth considering how you have generally been feeling lately as increased stress, low mood or any experience of loss can result in a temporary worsening of memory.

MCI and driving

Informing the DVLA

For many people with MCI, driving is not affected and the DVLA (Driving and Vehicle Licensing Authority) does not need to be notified. However, for some people with MCI the cognitive difficulties being experienced can impact on driving ability. This might come to light through specific difficulties being identified from the cognitive assessment such as difficulties concentrating, visual or problem solving difficulties, or concerns being raised about a possible change in driving ability. In these instances the DVLA must be notified.

You will be advised as to whether you need to notify the DVLA and advice will be provided about driving while the DVLA carry out their enquiries. Notifying the DVLA does not mean that you will be automatically stopped from driving, instead enquires will be made to reach a decision around driving ability. In some cases an assessment of driving ability may also be requested. To notify the DVLA you can complete form CG1 (available to download from the DVLA's website www.gov.uk) or write a letter to explain, giving your driving licence number, full name and date of birth to:

Drivers Medical Enquiries
DVLA
Swansea, SA99 1TU

If you do not inform the DVLA when advised to do this, you are committing a criminal offence and can be fined up to £1,000.

Informing your motor insurance company

Although not everyone with a diagnosis of MCI is required to inform the DVLA (see above) this may not be the case regarding your motor insurance company. This is because, in the event of a claim, an insurance company may decide that you are liable (and will therefore not pay out) if they have not been informed of all relevant information. You should therefore seek advice from your motor insurance provider about whether you should inform them of a diagnosis of MCI even if you have been told that you are not required to inform the DVLA.

Further reading

- Clare, L & Wilson, B. (1997). *Coping with Memory Problems: A practical guide for people with memory impairments, their relatives, friends and carers.* Thames Valley Test Company. London. This book can be purchased online.
- Alzheimer's Society (2014). *Memory Handbook.* Alzheimer's Society Publications. . You can order a free copy from the Alzheimer's Society Publications Orderline on Tel: 0300 303 5933 or email: orders@alzheimers.org.uk

Useful organisations

- Age UK
Main office address: Tavis House, 1-6 Tavistock Square, London, WC1H 9NA
Advice line: 0800 169 2081
Website: www.ageuk.org.uk
Age UK provide information and advice about benefits, care, health and wellbeing, travel and learning.
- Carers UK
20 Great Dover Street, London, SE1 4LX
Telephone: 020 7378 4999. Carers Line: 0808 808 7777
www.carersuk.org
Carers UK supports carers who are providing unpaid care for friends and relatives.

References

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http://alzheimers.org/site/scripts/documents_info.php?documentID-102
- Alzheimer's Society. *Memory Handbook* (2014). Alzheimer's Society Publications
- Alzheimer's Society (2015). *Mild Cognitive Impairment.*
http://alzheimers.org/site/scripts/documents_info.php?documentID-120
- Clare, L. & Wilson, B. (1997). *Coping with Memory Problems: A practical guide for people with memory impairments, their relatives, friends and carers.* Thames Valley Test Company. London
- DVLA (2016) *Assessing fitness to drive – a guide for medical professionals*
- Patient Publications (2013). *Mild Cognitive Impairment* www.patient.info/doctor/mild-cognitive-impairment

This leaflet was developed by the Memory Protection Service, Northumberland, Tyne and Wear NHS Foundation Trust.



Further information about the content, reference sources or production of this leaflet can be obtained from the Patient Information Centre.

This information can be made available in a range of formats on request (eg Braille, audio, larger print, easy read, BSL or other languages). Please contact the Patient Information Centre Tel: 0191 223 2545

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