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alz.org/CaCentral

## What actually is MCI?

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It can be frightening to notice changes in your cognitive abilities and, with the awareness of Alzheimer's disease at an all-time high, these changes can be more worrisome. At times, a person may forget someone's name, where he put his keys, or she may even struggle to remember the date. But when memory loss begins to become troublesome, and he notices that it's happening more and more, Mild Cognitive Impairment (MCI) should be considered.

### What exactly is MCI?

Mild Cognitive Impairment (MCI) means that an individual's brain is suffering from losses in memory, attention, language, or organizational skills that are greater than the changes generally associated with the normal aging process. MCI overlaps with both normal-age related cognitive impairments and the onset of progressive dementia. And like dementia, MCI is not a disease, but a cluster of symptoms that describes changes in how a person thinks or processes information.

Similar to dementia, memory problems are the most common indicators of MCI, but a person with MCI may also experience difficulties with judgment, reason, and language beyond what one might expect with normal aging. For unknown reasons, MCI appears to affect men more than women.

There are two general classifications for MCI:

#### MCI that primarily affects memory:

A person may begin to forget important information that he or she would previously have recalled easily, such as appointments, conversations, or recent events.



#### MCI that affects thinking skills other than memory:

A person may have difficulty making logical decisions, judge the time or the sequence of steps needed to complete a complex task, or may lack visual perception.

Although MCI shares similar symptoms with dementia, it is worth noting that a person with MCI will not experience the same progressive symptoms as one who has been diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease, Lewy body disease, or other types of progressive dementia. Not everyone with MCI develops dementia. In other words, many individuals will not experience worsening symptoms.

The person with MCI will recognize she is having trouble, but will find that she is still able to carry on most of her usual activities and live independently. Family members and friends may notice the symptoms associated with MCI, but might not express concern because the early symptoms can mimic normal, age-related changes and a person with MCI may not show any personality changes. Friends and loved ones may want to focus on her present abilities and avoid worrying about what might happen in the future. There are many ways to live an active and productive life,



## Tips

### For communicating with a person who has a diagnosis of MCI:

- Understand that communication styles may need to be changed
- Avoid arguing
- Don't talk about the afflicted person as if he or she were not there
- Be patient and give support
- Avoid criticism and correcting
- Focus on feelings, not the facts
- Talk slowly and clearly

## Tools

### LIVEWELL ONLINE RESOURCES:

Living a quality life in the early stage of dementia is a choice. The resource below can help empower you to take steps to live well for as long as possible, find the confidence to face challenges ahead, and ensure you have a voice in how you live your best life with MCI.

Click: [LIVEWELL](#)

so it is best to focus on what a person can do, not on what she can't.

### Helpful Tips and Tools

Often people diagnosed with MCI find it very useful to start using visible and/or accessible reminders, such as writing notes to oneself, posting a large calendar to track appointments, leaving messages to oneself on a personal answering machine, using an automatic dispensing pill box, and setting the alarm on a mobile device to help remember upcoming events. It is very helpful to keep one's mind active doing things that he enjoys: Work on puzzles, read the newspaper, play cards, listen to music, write in a journal, and learn about something new.

Another way to keep active is to become an advocate for oneself and other individuals with MCI. This can be done by writing letters and making phone calls to local and state representatives, as well as assisting community agencies in training staff and professionals about MCI. **For more information and to register for this year's California's Advocacy Day: [tinyurl.com/advocacyday2018](http://tinyurl.com/advocacyday2018)**

### If you have MCI

It is not uncommon for a person who experiences the symptoms of MCI to feel frustrated. Although it is easier said than done, it is important to be patient with oneself and ask your family to be patient with you. Sometimes sticking to a routine and slowing down can make it easier to remember sequences, instructions, or to complete a task. Learning about MCI enables you to share what is happening with those around you and they will better understand the changes that are affecting you.



It may be necessary to change your daily routine due to MCI. Although a time may come when you must rely on others for assistance with some tasks, you will want to stay involved in making decisions that affect your life. Your goal is to find a balance in your life: ensuring your safety while maintaining a reasonable degree of independence. Be sure to exercise, stay active in activities you like, talk with a close friend or counselor, and consider joining a support group for people with memory loss. These strategies may offer constructive ways to release the anger and frustration you may feel.

### The Alzheimer's Association can help

If you or your family members have increasing concerns about your cognitive abilities and memory, the cause may be MCI. These changes do not occur suddenly but evolve over time. In addition to these cognitive symptoms (or perhaps because of them), many people with MCI also experience secondary emotional symptoms such as depression, anxiety, irritability, or apathy.

It will help to talk to others experiencing the same symptoms or consulting with specialists who can help you understand the changes you are undergoing. It is important for your family members to also seek counseling and support to meet their emotional needs.

A new diagnosis of MCI for yourself or a loved one can be difficult to accept. As you learn more about this condition, we encourage you to keep an open mind and remember that you are not alone.

Contact the Alzheimer's Association for information, support, and referrals to community resources.

- 1.800.272.3900
- [alz.org/Ca/Central](http://alz.org/Ca/Central)