
What is Mild Cognitive Impairment (MCI)?

“Mild Cognitive Impairment” (MCI) refers to a condition in which there is a decline in one’s usual cognitive abilities e.g., (memory, language functions, reasoning) but not to the extent that it is obvious in daily living activities, like banking, driving, managing medication and taking care of usual responsibilities. MCI has recently become of concern to medical practitioners because it can be a sign of progressive decline to a state of dementia. This is true when the MCI is caused by Alzheimer changes in the brain. There are other causes of MCI, however, that may be not cause progression or that may be amenable to treatment.

Signs & Symptoms

- Mild memory loss
 - Trouble finding words
 - Having difficulty organizing or planning
 - Trouble with managing bills or accounts
 - Lack of initiative or motivation in the absence of depression
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Diagnosis & Treatment

Diagnosis Process

A work up by a behavioral neurologist is necessary to rule-out other causes for the cognitive changes noted by patient and/or family. This includes blood tests (to exclude other causes of MCI like thyroid or kidney disease), MRI scan of the brain (to look for causes such as strokes or tumors), neurological examination (to look for motor and sensory signs that could be associated with disorders like Parkinson’s disease), neuropsychological testing (to identify the cognitive impairments and determine how much difference there is from others the same age and from estimates of one’s best former level of ability) and a review of how symptoms are affecting every day functioning, that is, if there is evidence observable to others that the patient knows, of a decline in daily functional capacity. If there is such a decline, then the cognitive symptoms are classified under the term “dementia”. Often, the neuropsychological evaluation is the only evidence of abnormal cognition.

Medications

There are no medications to treat the symptoms of MCI. The medications available to treat Alzheimer's disease have been used in some studies but are not always recommended. For this reason, it is important that the memory loss or other thinking changes are evaluated to consider options.

Living with MCI

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Progression

Persons with MCI have an increased risk for developing Alzheimer's Disease (a neurodegeneration brain condition) or a related disease (e.g., frontotemporal dementia) especially if the main change is in short term memory. This progression is likely to occur within 5 years of the diagnosis of MCI. However, not everyone with MCI will develop Alzheimer's disease or related dementia.

To Family and Friends

Consider how the changes caused by MCI are affecting the person's life. Support this person to stay active and find strategies for coping. Keep in mind that the memory loss and other changes are caused by the MCI and cannot be controlled by the person.

Resources for MCI

Support

Symptoms of MCI are often frustrating causing some persons to withdraw from social activities. To help cope with the changes caused by MCI, finding support is very important.

- Stay active: keep up with interests. Make modifications when possible to accommodate for short term memory or other changes.
- Lead a healthy lifestyle:
 - Eat right, your brain needs proper food and liquid to function normally
 - Exercise, there is a lot of evidence that aerobic exercise slows cognitive decline

- Maintain sleep hygiene and address problems if they exist.
- Talk with others about your concerns: let close friends and family know what you are going through so that you may gain their support.
- Clinical Social Workers are available to meet with patients of the Neurobehavior and Memory Clinic.

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