

Information for  
patients diagnosed with

# **MILD COGNITIVE IMPAIRMENT (MCI)** in Greater Manchester

Taking care of our health.

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## INTRODUCTION

You have been diagnosed with Mild Cognitive Impairment. What happens next? This leaflet will provide you with more information.

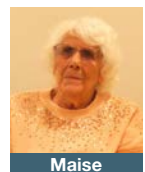
## WHAT IS COGNITION?

‘Cognition’ is a term used to describe our mental abilities, such as memory and thinking. It includes processes such as attention, judgment, decision making and production of language.

## WHAT IS MILD COGNITIVE IMPAIRMENT (MCI)?

Generally, as we get older our brain ages and it is normal for us to experience some decline in cognitive function. However, some of us experience this to a level which is greater than that which we might expect for someone in our age group. If you have been told that you have Mild Cognitive Impairment (MCI)

“Everyone kept saying it was just getting older, we all get forgetful. Then my GP said I was ‘in the grey area’ – I found out that meant MCI.”



Maisie

“I was so glad to get the diagnosis – it meant I could put a name to what was wrong with me, and maybe now I could do something about it.”



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. Sometimes doctors explain this condition as mild memory loss.

MCI is more than just normal forgetfulness and means a difficulty that is greater than would be expected with 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 additional problems and a small number can recover.

## WHAT ARE THE CAUSES OF MCI?

Often it can be difficult to identify the underlying cause of MCI as there can be a number of different reasons. Your doctor may be able to identify possible underlying causes of your MCI, however sometimes this may not be clear. You will be guided through this by your doctor. Please remember, whatever the cause, having MCI is not the person's fault.

## WHAT CAN YOU EXPECT?

Common difficulties experienced by people with an MCI include:

- Misplacing items;
- Problems retaining information such, as recalling phone messages;
- Forgetting what you have done recently and events you have attended;
- Forgetting future plans, such as remembering upcoming appointments;
- Recalling the names of people or things;
- Losing track of what you wanted to say in conversation;
- Word finding difficulties – finding the right word you want to say in conversation;
- Difficulty in describing objects or situations;
- Apathy – loss of enthusiasm for previously enjoyed activities

“Meeting with others who have MCI is so good, even if its just for a cup of tea and a chat. You know you are not the only one and we learn from each other.”

Norman

“Knowledge is power, the more you know the better.”



## WHAT CAN YOU DO TO HELP YOURSELF?

### Look at how you do things

There are a range of different coping strategies that can make life easier if you notice a change in your cognitive functions. You can adapt your environment to help Support your memory and thinking skills:

- Put a notebook by the phone to note down any phone calls and messages.
- Write important dates and appointments on a calendar or white board.
- 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.
- Use a pill box or weekly dispenser for tablets. These can be requested free of charge via your pharmacist.

### Follow a set routine

Another way to make life easier is to follow a set routine. This can help compensate for any memory difficulties as you get used to what to expect, e.g. taking night time medication straight after cleaning teeth, or doing the weekly shopping the same day each week.

### Use memory aids

Using memory aids can be also be helpful. These can 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 appointments.
- Notebook – to write down information that you want to remember.
- Calendar – displayed in a prominent place can be a good way to remember appointments and events. Remember to check this each day.
- Get a clock which shows the day, date and time
- Making lists of what to do – e.g. shopping lists.

“ Sometimes I get really anxious and wonder if I’m getting worse, but I don’t want to bother my GP. ”

Connie

- 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.

### Improve your attention

- Minimise distractions e.g. turning off the television or radio when trying to complete a task
- Take frequent breaks – cognitive problems get worse when we are tired.
- Find the best time of day that suits you i.e. when you feel at your most alert, and schedule tasks for during this time.
- Do one thing at a time; tackling too many things at once can become confusing.
- Break up tasks into small steps to make them more manageable.


“I was frightened because I thought it meant I would get dementia.”

Marion



## Improve your wellbeing

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

- Have an active lifestyle and maintain all the interests and activities that you enjoy – try not to stop your hobbies and activities. Keeping contact with your friends and family is also important.
  - 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.
  - Take your time – there is no need to hurry.
  - If you feel you need more support to manage your mood visit your GP
  - See your local GP or pharmacist to review your medication as some tablets can cause memory problems.
- 
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- Have your hearing and eyesight checked as these can affect your wellbeing.
- Have an annual flu vaccination. Infection will make memory problems much worse.

## CAN YOU AVOID DEVELOPING 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 appropriate 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.

“As a GP I spend a lot of time advising people of the benefits of exercising regularly and having a healthy diet.”



## ARE 'MEMORY MEDICATIONS' EFFECTIVE FOR MCI?

A number of studies completed have shown that using memory drugs for the treatment of MCI does 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.

## WHAT ABOUT THE LONG TERM?

For some people with MCI, difficulties can get better if the problems are due to physical health 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 might not get any worse either.

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, approximately 10-15% per year develop dementia.

“There’s been a lot of research done in preventing and treating dementia but unfortunately we don’t have a medical cure as yet. The future looks hopeful as research progresses.”

Dr Jeff Schryer

## RESEARCH: HOPE FOR THE FUTURE

Research is making significant progress in understanding MCI and Manchester is leading the way in this field. However, to deepen our knowledge and give us a fighting chance of treating cognitive problems, researchers rely on support from patients and members of the public. If you would like to know more about the ground-breaking studies taking place in Manchester right now and how you can play a role, sign-up to learn more through Join Dementia Research ([www.joindementiaresearch.nihr.ac.uk](http://www.joindementiaresearch.nihr.ac.uk) or phone 0300 111 5 111). Anyone can sign up, whether you're living with a cognitive impairment, have a family history of dementia or are just interested in research.

## DRIVING WITH MCI

If driving is not affected, then 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 visual or problem-solving difficulties, or concerns being raised about a possible change in driving ability. In these instances, the DVLA should be notified.



The memory service clinicians will advise as to whether you need to notify the DVLA dependent on the results of your diagnosis. Notifying the DVLA does not mean that you will be automatically stopped from driving, instead inquiries will be made to reach a decision around driving ability. In some cases, an assessment of driving ability may also be requested. Remember that if you drive when impaired you endanger other road users as well as yourself.

To notify the DVLA you can complete the form at the back of your driving license or write a letter to explain, giving your driving license number, full name and address to: Drivers Medical Group 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. You must also tell your car insurance company. If you do not tell them and then have an accident, they may refuse to pay the claim.

Transport for Greater Manchester (TfGM) offer a free Safer Driving for Longer course which enables experienced older drivers to reflect on their own driving. For more information please go to: <https://tfgm.com/drivesafe/safer-driving-for-longer-course>.





## **NOW I HAVE A DIAGNOSIS WHAT SUPPORT IS AVAILABLE TO ME?**

Each Borough will manage its own support provision and networks for people diagnosed with MCI. You should receive some local information on support services when you are given your diagnosis and this leaflet.

On the back page you will find contact details for support in your local area. Keep this leaflet handy so that you can make contact when you need to.

## REFERENCES

- Alzheimer's Society (2010). Mild Cognitive Impairment.  
[http://alzheimers.org/site/scripts/documents\\_info.php?documentID-120](http://alzheimers.org/site/scripts/documents_info.php?documentID-120)
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- 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 (2014) At a glance guide to the current medical standards of fitness to drive

For further Information on what support is available to you in your area please contact: