

Mild Cognitive Impairment

By Kate McCarthy

Margaret sometimes has troubles finding words as she speaks. She knows what she wants to say, but the words just seem to slip away. She halts mid-sentence searching, gets frustrated and then in embarrassment gives up speaking. She wonders why she fails to remember the simplest words. James forgets which day he promised to watch the grandkids and often finds himself in the store with no idea what he came to buy. He chuckles at his absent mindedness, but worries that there might be something really wrong.



*There is a difference between
Alzheimer's and MCI.*

Memory loss

With all the talk in the media about Alzheimer's disease it is easy to jump the gun and assume the worst the each time the car keys can't be found. We all forget things, but it can be very unsettling when it happens frequently. Most elderly people live in fear of being diagnosed with Alzheimer's so each memory lapse causes anxiety and worry. Yet there is another possible explanation for short term memory problems. This common condition is called Mild Cognitive Impairment.

Mild Cognitive Impairment (MCI) is a diagnosis used for people with significant short-term memory loss. The symptoms people with MCI experience are different and less severe than those associated with Alzheimer's. People with MCI are usually pretty sharp cognitively and are able to retain their reasoning skills. They can manage their own finances and easily recall events from the past. Yet those close to them will notice a short-term loss memory issues which are severe enough that to affect their social and occupational lives.

Fear and misunderstanding about Alzheimer's disease leads to confusion between the two conditions even though the symptoms are different.

MCI Symptoms

- ✓ Near normal cognitive functions, like thinking, understanding and decision-making abilities.
- ✓ Daily living functions are near normal.
- ✓ Little to no change in personality.
- ✓ Memory impaired compared to similar aged people.
- ✓ Condition may not progress over time.

Alzheimer's Symptoms

- ✓ Impairment in cognitive functions, including thinking, understanding and decision-making abilities.
- ✓ Impairment in normal activities of daily living.
- ✓ Changes in personality.
- ✓ Impairments in memory and judgment.
- ✓ Progressive loss of functions over time.

MCI concerns

People diagnosed with Mild Cognitive Impairment are often relieved to hear their troubles are not Alzheimer's. Yet those diagnosed with MCI have a 12 - 15 percent higher risk of progressing to Alzheimer's disease unless steps are taken to slow its progression. An MCI diagnosis can be seen as the red flag that it is time to be proactive about cognitive issues.

Not a normal part of aging

People generally chalk up forgetfulness to age, but memory loss is not a normal or a natural process of aging. Although the brain will go through some natural changes as a person ages, mental decline is largely preventable and can even be reversed with the right amount of mental exercise and stimulation.

Reverse cognitive impairment

Regenerating a brain with cognitive issues requires proper nutrition, physical exercise, stress management and appropriate prescription medications. But most importantly, brain regeneration requires vigorous mental exercise on a daily basis. Studies show that rigorous cognitive workouts improve the mind and memory of those beginning to show signs of mental deterioration. Participating in brain challenging activities will actually increase the size of the brain, the number of brain cells and the connection between these cells. According to Alzheimer's Research & Prevention Foundation, actively taking part in brain stimulating activity can reduce risk of developing Alzheimer's disease by as much as 50-70

percent. Making preventative changes can stop further cognitive decline and can even delay the full onset of Alzheimer's disease.

Sources:

"Mild Cognitive Impairment (MCI) & Early Alzheimer's disease, Symptoms, Diagnosis and Treatment" brochure. Alzheimer's Research & Prevention Foundation.



Kate McCarthy is Director of Operations for HomeAid Health Care which provides services for the elderly who wish to remain safe and independent at home. HomeAid is sister company to Prairie Home Assisted Living which has served the physical, spiritual, mental and health needs of their Residents since 1999. Together the two family owned companies provide comprehensive care for the elderly in the Fox Valley of Wisconsin.