

# Mild cognitive impairment



**dementia**  
understand together

**DSiDC**  
Dementia Services Information  
and Development Centre

# Mild cognitive impairment

## Who this booklet is for

This booklet is to help people who find their memory is not what it used to be. This can mean you can't easily find the words you want or are noticing changes in how your mind is working. The changes are beyond what is normal for a persons' age and education level.

## What you will find in this booklet

This booklet will tell you what mild cognitive impairment is, changes that may happen and what you can do to live with it and have a full life.

## How serious are these changes?

These changes are serious enough to be noticed by you and others around you, but not severe enough to interfere with your daily life or independence.

Health care professionals can help you to find out why you are noticing changes and what you can do about it.

## What if I am reading this booklet for a family member or friend?

Talk to them, find out their wishes and preferences and do things with them and not for them. Every person is different but we all have something in common – we all want to be heard.



# What is Mild Cognitive Impairment (MCI)?

If you have been told that you have mild cognitive impairment (MCI), this means that your cognition (mental activity) is not as good as it used to be.

Cognition usually refers to:

- › memory
- › problem solving
- › thinking
- › attention
- › concentration
- › language
- › other areas

MCI is more than just normal forgetting and means a difficulty that is greater than would be expected for normal ageing.

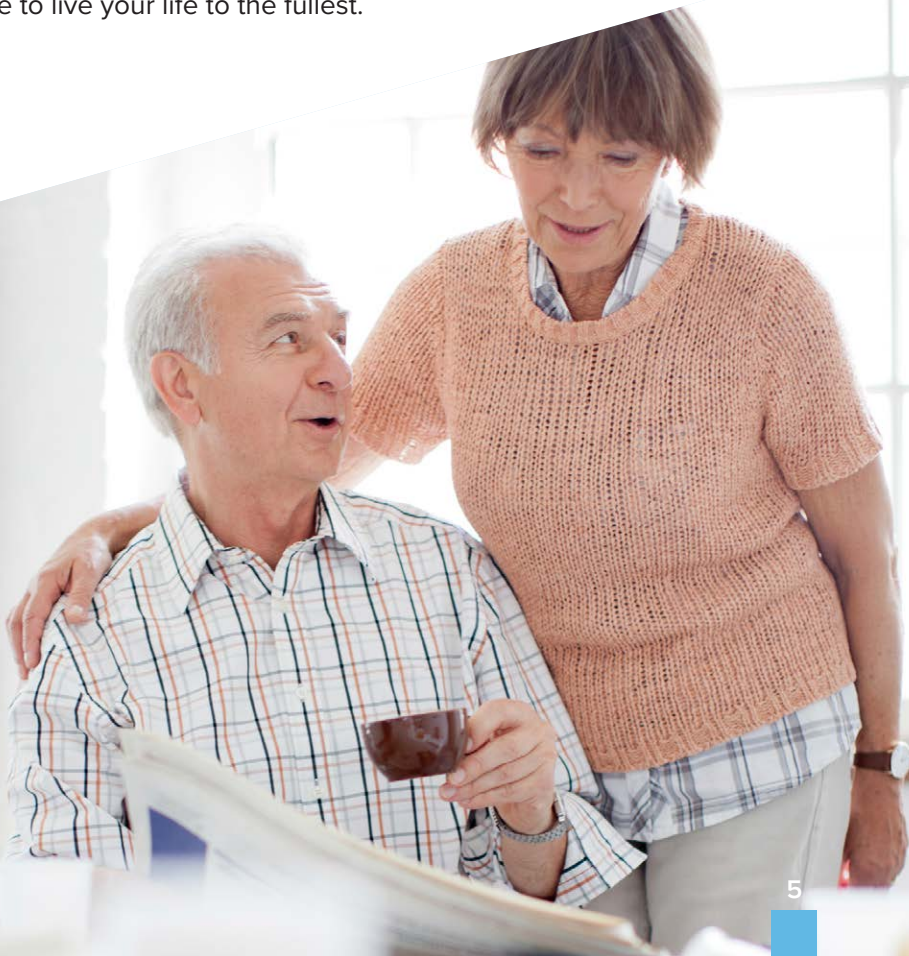
## Is MCI the same as dementia?

No, MCI is not the same as dementia.

Some people may see their cognition improve, some people will remain stable with their MCI and some people will go on to develop a dementia.

There are many causes for MCI and it can be difficult to predict who will develop a dementia and who will not.

The best thing you can do now is to improve your lifestyle, develop good routines, make adjustments to your home environment and ensure that you continue to live your life to the fullest.



# What could be causing this?

Many things can affect the way we function.

## Life changes

- › Ageing
- › Menopause
- › Changes in lifestyle – like retirement
- › Bereavement of family and friends

## Health and stressful situations

- › Lack of sleep
- › Poor thyroid function
- › Poor diet
- › Medications
- › Family discord (upset)
- › Financial problems
- › Stress
- › Depression
- › Anxiety

## Using substances

- › Alcohol
- › Tobacco
- › Recreational drugs

A health care professional needs to fully assess you to understand what is affecting **you**.



## What changes can I experience?

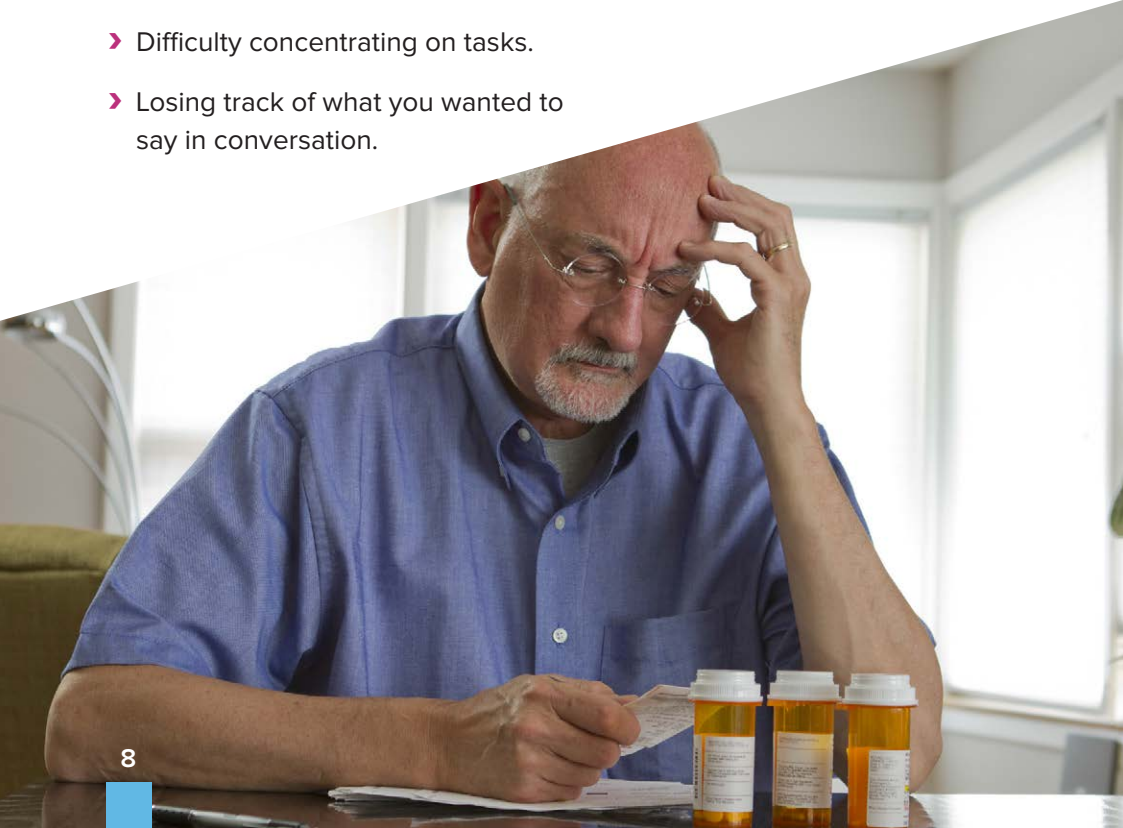
The changes that people with MCI notice can vary, and they depend on what area of your cognition is affected. Those changes go beyond what is expected for normal ageing.

In the following pages, you can find examples of changes that you could experience.



# Memory

- › Misplacing things.
- › Difficulty keeping information such as recalling conversations or shopping lists.
- › Forgetting what you have done recently and events you have attended.
- › Forgetting what you are planning to do such as going to an appointment.
- › Forgetting what you went into a room to collect, and not being able to remember what it was when you retrace your steps.
- › Difficulty remembering the names of people or things.
- › Difficulty concentrating on tasks.
- › Losing track of what you wanted to say in conversation.







## Language

- › Forgetting names.
- › Word finding difficulties – this means not being able to find the word you want to say in conversation.
- › Difficulty in describing objects or situations.
- › Being less fluent in conversation.

## Problem solving and concentration

- › Difficulty with planning and problem solving in relation to cooking, household chores, DIY tasks and other things you are used to doing well.
- › Being more distracted when carrying out tasks. Difficulty adapting to changes in your routine.
- › Changes in judgement, personality or behaviour.

## Other changes

- › Low mood or depression can set in.
- › Increased feelings of irritability or having more difficulty coping with stress.
- › Apathy – loss of enthusiasm for activities you used to enjoy. Feelings can include sadness, anger, worry or frustration.
- › Experiencing more difficulty finding your way and recalling directions.
- › Difficulty judging distances.
- › Difficulty coordinating tasks such as getting dressed.





## Questions you may have

### Is there a medication for this?

No, there is no medication for mild cognitive impairment.

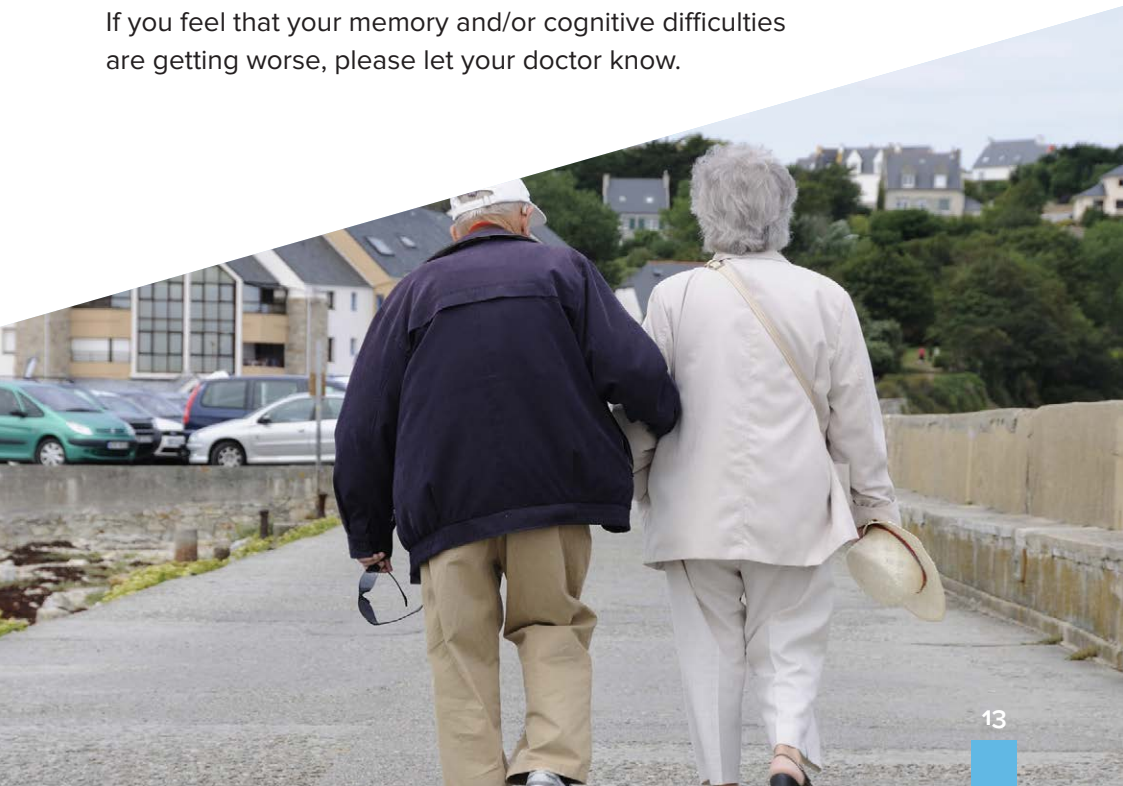
In fact, a number of studies have shown that using memory drugs for the treatment of MCI does not improve memory and does not prevent decline over time.

### How will I know that my problems are getting worse?

You may notice a change in your ability in everyday life to do tasks such as cooking, shopping and household chores.

Problems may get more serious and/or occur more often. It can be helpful to check whether family or close friends have also noticed any changes.

If you feel that your memory and/or cognitive difficulties are getting worse, please let your doctor know.





# What can I do to help?

Continue to lead an active life and maintain all the interests and activities that you enjoy – try not to stop doing anything.

Add things to your life one at a time if you aren't active: buy the newspaper, ring a friend every day or join a group which does exercise or activities you like.

## Exercise regularly

Walk, swim, join a gym, play a sport. The recommended level of activity is 30 minutes a day five days a week.

## Eat a healthy diet

More fish and white meat, less red meat, more fruit, vegetables, pulses (beans, lentils and peas), and cereals. Avoid eating fatty foods.

## Stay healthy

Keep your weight, your blood pressure and blood sugars within healthy limits – your GP (family doctor) will help with this.

## Drink less alcohol

Reduce what you drink to within recommended limits.

## Smoking

If you smoke, look for help to stop.

## Challenge your brain

Buy a new book. Try to do a word search. Play a board game. Learn something new.



## Sing

Listen to music. And if you're brave, try to play music.

## Be mindful

Give yourself quiet time, gather your thoughts. Practise mindfulness, focusing on the present, not on the past or the future.

## Mind your mental health

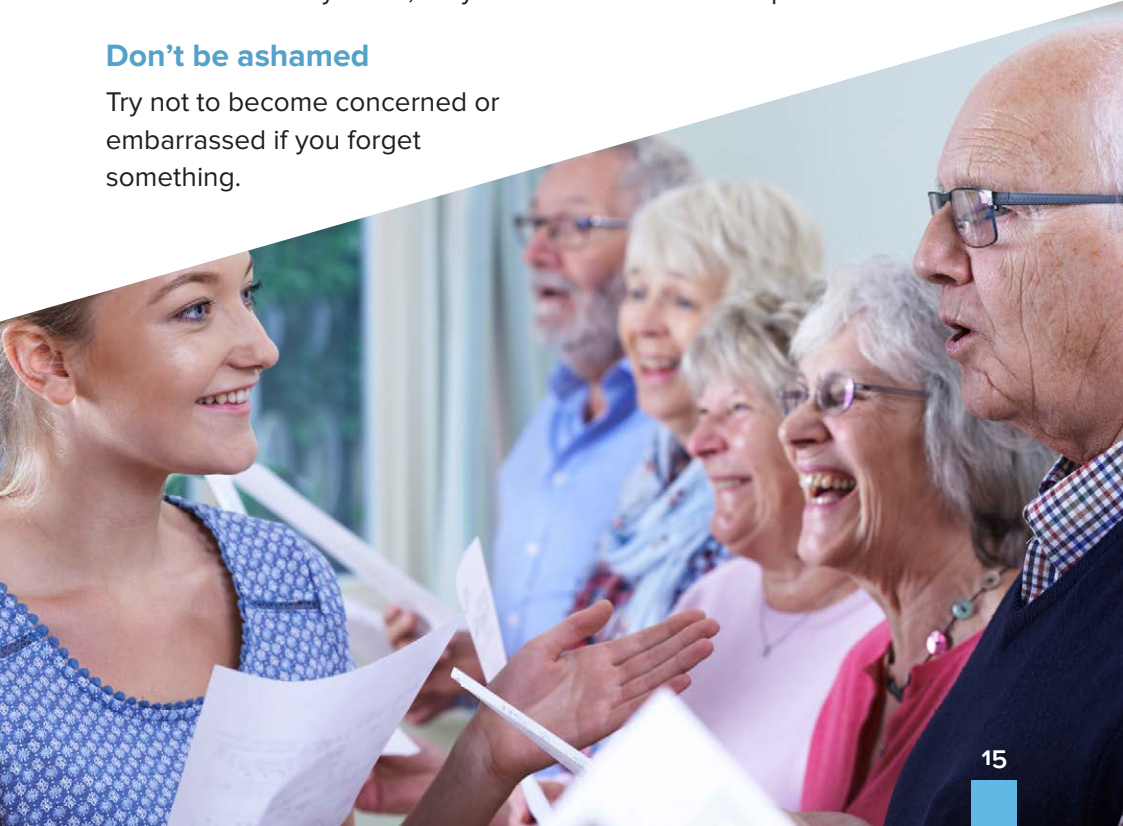
If you notice that you are becoming low in mood or anxious, talk about your feelings and also visit your doctor.

## Share how you feel

It can be helpful to tell family and friends about your difficulties – if they know, they can understand and help.

## Don't be ashamed

Try not to become concerned or embarrassed if you forget something.



## Break it down

Break up tasks into small steps to make them more manageable.

## Follow a set routine

You can help yourself remember if you know what you do first and what goes after.

## Take your time

There is no need to hurry. Adapt your life to suit your needs. Make it easier on yourself!

## Use memory aids

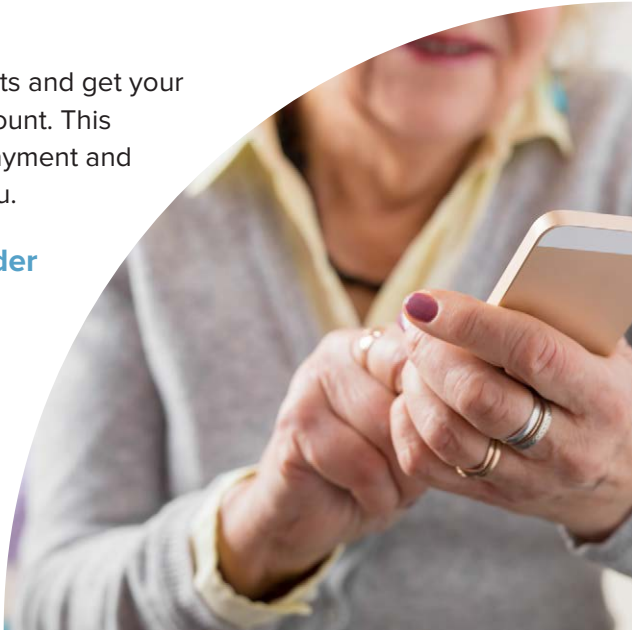
- › A notice board can be useful for leaving messages for family members and writing reminders to yourself.
- › You can leave sticky backed notes in places around the home to remind you to do things.
- › Alarm clocks, timers, mobile phones can be used as a prompt for activities such as taking food out of the oven or reminding you it is time to go to an appointment.

## Organise your finances

Set up direct debits for payments and get your money paid into your bank account. This reduces the risk of missing a payment and carrying too much cash with you.

## Get your legal affairs in order

Make a will if you haven't done so yet.









## How making small changes in your home can help you

If you have any mobility problems, consider getting the advice of an occupational therapist. They will advise on changes in the home, furnishings and layout, as well as suggest adaptive aids to help make your life easier.

Adaptive aids include hand rails, bathing equipment, walking frames, raised toilet seats, and so on.

### Declutter

Make sure there are no tripping hazards. For example: loose carpets, rugs, cables, or objects lying around on the floor.

### Monitor your alarms

Make sure your smoke alarm and carbon monoxide alarms are in working order. Get them fitted if you don't have them.

## Have good lighting

Make sure all bulbs work and your house is well lit.

## Nightlights

Install nightlights, so that you can see where you are going if you need to get up during the night.

## Notebooks

Use a notebook, calendar or diary to help you remember. Put a notebook by the phone to note down any phone calls and messages.

## Drawing

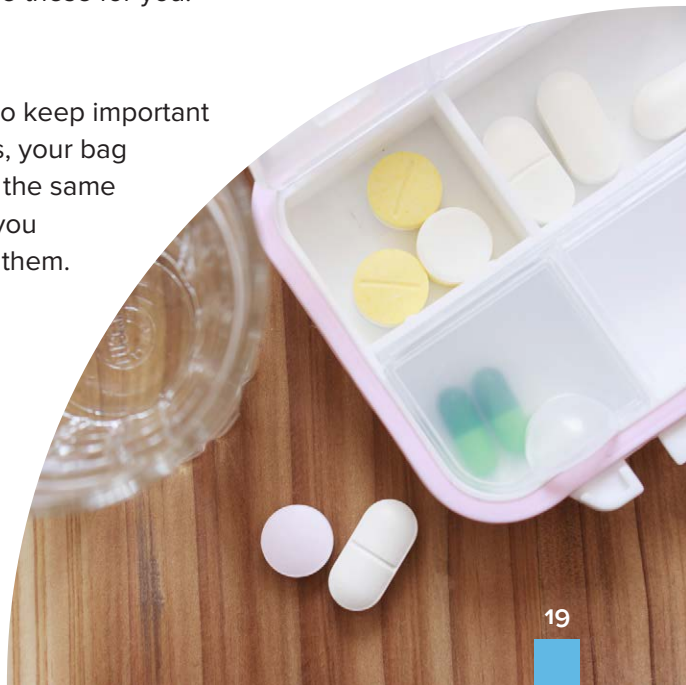
Try drawing to help your memory. It doesn't matter if your drawing isn't good. It may help you remember.

## Medicine

Use a medicine dispenser or a blister pack for medication. Your pharmacy can organise these for you.

## Have a home for items

Decide on a special place to keep important items such as keys, glasses, your bag or wallet. Put items back in the same place after using them, so you always know where to find them.



# Where can I get more information about memory loss?

Talk to your **GP** or **specialist doctor**.

Visit the following websites for helpful resources and leaflets:

- › [www.dementia.ie](http://www.dementia.ie)
- › [www.understandtogether.ie](http://www.understandtogether.ie)
- › [www.alzheimer.ie](http://www.alzheimer.ie)

These websites talk about dementia, do not let this discourage you as not everyone with MCI will develop dementia.



**DSiDC**

Dementia Services Information  
and Development Centre

**dementia**

under stand together



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[www.dementia.ie](http://www.dementia.ie)



**Plain  
English**  
Approved by NALA