

EPUT



Essex Partnership University
NHS Foundation Trust

MCI | MILD COGNITIVE IMPAIRMENT

INFORMATION LEAFLET



EPUT

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Welcome

Receiving a diagnosis of Mild Cognitive Impairment (MCI) can be a stressful time for you and your loved ones. You might have a lot of questions about MCI, about how to manage your difficulties and about your prognosis. In adjusting to any new health diagnosis, the first stage in emotional adjustment can be 'shock' or 'denial' where you haven't yet had time to let this news sink in.

Now that you have had more time since your appointment when you received your diagnosis, you might feel that you have more questions. You might be relieved that you have not been given a diagnosis of dementia. However, it is also normal to be worried about the future of your diagnosis. This could be a very uncertain time in your life and you should take some time to think about how you are coping and what support you would like.

MCI is a complex condition to understand and define, so we hope this leaflet will bring you some clarity about this diagnosis and what you can do to manage your symptoms.

Our NHS colleagues have created the videos below to provide information on risk factors for brain health as well as overall wellbeing to support people with MCI. In these links you will find 5 sessions, each focusing on different areas of lifestyle important for wellbeing and reducing risk for developing dementia.

Session 1 - <https://youtu.be/p5SyfSA2BCc>

Session 2 - <https://youtu.be/OJZFHupNu18>

Session 3 - <https://youtu.be/jGkDC1uW09A>

Session 4 - <https://youtu.be/Va7VU9OeSjk>

Session 5 - <https://youtu.be/ytvkCQbZnpU>

What is MCI?

MCI is a condition affecting the brain, which can cause mild problems with mental abilities (cognition), such as memory, concentration, thinking, judgment, language and visual ability.

Most healthy people experience a gradual decline in mental abilities as part of ageing. In someone with MCI, however, the decline in mental abilities is greater than in normal ageing. For example, it's common in normal ageing to have to pause to remember directions or to forget words occasionally, but it's not usual to become lost in familiar places or to forget the names of close family members. It is estimated that between 5 to 20% of people above age 65 have MCI.



Causes and Symptoms of MCI

Often it can be difficult to identify the underlying cause of MCI as there can be a number of different reasons. MCI can have a number of different possible causes with contributing factors such as high blood pressure, being overweight or obese, smoking, poor diet or alcohol use. Some of these are treatable and some are not. Your doctor may be able to identify possible underlying causes of your MCI, however sometimes this may not be clear. A thorough assessment might lead to diagnosis of conditions (e.g. depression) that can be treated.

MCI is not a specific disease but describes a set of symptoms. The types of difficulties and changes experienced by someone with MCI vary from person to person. These can affect but are not limited to problems with:

- Memory - for example, forgetting recent events from your life or repeating yourself in conversations
- Attention - for example, you might find that you are easily distracted
- Reasoning - includes planning and problem-solving, struggling with thinking things through
- Language - you might find that you are taking longer to think of the correct word for something
- Visual depth perception - for example, struggling to judge distances or navigate stairs

You, or the people around you, might have already noticed some of these symptoms. For a person with MCI, these changes may cause them to experience minor problems or need a little help with more demanding daily tasks (e.g. paying bills, managing medication, driving). However, MCI does not cause major problems with everyday living. If a person's difficulties have a significant impact on everyday activities, this may suggest a dementia.

MCI and Dementia

Although MCI is often thought of as a midway state between normal ageing and early dementia, having MCI does not necessarily mean that a person will go on to develop dementia. Various studies show differing results in their estimates of how many people with MCI will progress to dementia, but typically it is reported that 10% to 15% of people with MCI develop dementia per year.

However, a substantial proportion of people diagnosed with MCI do not develop dementia and are found to have stable or even improved cognitive function when it is re-tested over time. We do not yet have reliable ways to predict these changes over time.

The Alzheimer's Society recognise that people with MCI do not have dementia, but they still offer advice and support to people living with MCI and their carers. Their phone number is **0333 150 3456**.

Benefits of diagnosis

The main benefit of diagnosing MCI is that it helps to identify people who are at increased risk of developing dementia and to offer healthy lifestyle advice. You will also be recalled for annual review and, if you do develop dementia, this can be diagnosed sooner so that information, advice, and support can be offered to you. It can also help other people around you to understand some of the difficulties you may experience on a day-to-day basis.

Management of MCI

There are currently no medications that have been approved for treating MCI. Nevertheless, there are things that someone with MCI can do to improve their health.

Lifestyle Changes to Improve Your Physical Health

People with MCI are also encouraged to lower their risk of developing dementia by adopting a healthy lifestyle.

Cardiac Health

MCI is more likely to progress to dementia if the person has a poorly controlled heart condition or diabetes, or has strokes. Therefore, treatment for MCI will often include medication for any heart conditions, or tablets to reduce high blood pressure, prevent clots or lower cholesterol. This medication should be prescribed by your GP and it is essential you attend any further health checks you are invited to. Managing your cardiac health will help ensure that the risk factors of developing dementia are reduced.

Smoking

Smokers are encouraged to stop smoking as this can improve your

general health. There are many benefits to giving up smoking as it can improve brain function, lung function and helps to reduce the risk of heart disease. This may also improve your fitness levels as breathing becomes easier and will help you keep more active.

- After only 3-9 months of not smoking your lung function increases by up to 10%
- After 1 year of not smoking your risk of heart disease is about half compared to a person still smoking
- After 15 years your risk of heart attack falls to the same as someone who has never smoked

There are many services which you can use to support you in stopping smoking. The Essex Wellbeing Service offers Smoking Cessation advice (for more information call: **0300 303 9988**).

You can also visit the 'MoreLife Smoking Cessation' website for advice and interventions - www.more-life.co.uk

Alternatively, you can call the NHS Smoke-free Helpline on **0300 123 1044** for tips to stop smoking.

Alcohol and Drugs

Those who drink alcohol are advised to keep to the recommended levels. Becoming more aware of your alcohol consumption is important as it is likely to affect your memory not only in the short term, but it may cause damage to the vessels in the brain and put you more at risk of developing dementia. Reducing your alcohol intake can improve any memory problems you may be experiencing and puts you less at risk of brain damage in the long term.

To find more information, support and advice around alcohol use you can contact the Essex ARC Phoenix Futures (**0137 631 6126**). They can provide you with one-to-one or group support, where you can share your experiences with other people that have similar experiences.

Drug abuse is associated with deficits in learning, retention and retrieval

of memories and may increase the risk of dementia.

However, for older adults who misuse substances, difficulties with cognition and other brain functions can be more serious. Older individuals are more sensitive than younger and middle-aged adults to the negative effects of drugs and alcohol on the brain. This puts older people who misuse substances at increased risk for certain problems with thinking (also called cognitive impairment or cognitive disorders), such as dementia and delirium.

If you need support for a substance misuse problem, you can contact Open Road (Harlow) on **01279 434621**.



Exercise

Exercise is considered an important factor in maintaining a healthy brain. This is because exercise increases blood flow to the brain and reduces inflammation and damage whilst also increasing cognitive capacity.

Exercising can improve everyday functional abilities that you may be struggling with such as walking upstairs, getting dressed or taking a shower.

Physical activity doesn't have to be strenuous to be beneficial for you and it is important to find a way of keeping active that works for you. For example, exercising does not always mean going to a gym and

lifting weights or spending 1 hour on the treadmill. You can exercise by taking walks, cleaning your home, gardening, swimming, cycling, playing golf or walking football and dancing. It might take time before you find an activity you really enjoy, but it is important to keep trying. Once you find something you enjoy, it might be helpful to start off with a small amount of activity (this could be a few minutes per day) and build up gradually. Over time this will become easier for you and you will begin to notice its benefits. The NHS recommends 150 minutes of cardiovascular activity per week and strength exercises twice a week. If you are new to exercise, don't overdo it. Build up your fitness slowly and seek advice from your doctor before starting a new exercise regime if you have an underlying condition, for example, heart disease.

There are services that can help you increase the amount of exercise you do.

- You could speak to your GP surgery's **Social Prescriber** about learning more about the available options in your area.
- A **Health and Wellbeing Coach** can refer you to available services in your area and help you with some practical tips – you can ask to be referred for this service through your GP or any other health professional
- You could find out about **local community groups** from **Frontline** – This can be a fun way for you to stay fit and also socialise with people from your local area

The FRONTLINE websites are a great source of information about all our local Health and Wellbeing services in West Essex. You can find out about all local clubs & community groups, charities and Health and SocialCare services at the three Frontline websites for West Essex:

<https://uttlesfordfrontline.org.uk>
<https://harlowfrontline.org.uk>

<https://www.epingforestfrontline.org.uk>

Diet

Eating a healthy diet and keeping to a healthy weight can also help with managing symptoms of MCI. It is important to eat a healthy balanced diet with plenty of fruit and vegetables, lots of starchy food, regular fish and some meat, but not too much saturated fats or dairy products such as cheese and butter. Sticking to a diet like this (Mediterranean diet) can lower homocysteine levels (higher levels are linked to heart disease), lower blood pressure, lower bad cholesterol and lessen diabetes. These are all risk factors which can increase your likelihood of developing dementia so it is important to manage and control these factors. If you think you might need support with managing your weight, there are services available that can help you with this. You can be referred to a Health & Wellbeing Coach via your local GP to support you in gaining knowledge and skills to keep your weight and diet under control.

If you have a Body Mass Index over 25 then you can be referred to the 'My Weight Matters' by the Essex Wellbeing Service. Whereas if your BMI is over 40, then a referral to MoreLife can be made. Your GP can also refer you to a dietician.

Sleep

Sleep plays a very important role in optimal cognitive functioning, memory and attention and executive function. You should aim to get between 7-8 hours of sleep per night. Sleep is a very complex and dynamic process and improving your sleep can boost your overall wellbeing. There are simple steps below you can follow to improve sleep.

For sleep advice and support check out the Essex Wellbeing Service 'Sleep & Tiredness' (<https://www.essexwellbeingsservice.co.uk/lifestyle/sleep>). They can work with you and set goals to improve

your sleep routine. This will often involve consideration to your overall lifestyle including diet, levels of physical activity and self-esteem. You can contact Essex Wellbeing Service on **0300 303 9988** or email **essexwellbeing@nhs.net** and ask about the 'Sleep & Tiredness' programme.

Sight and Hearing

Sight and hearing problems are more common as you get older. Problems with hearing and eyesight can cause extra problems for people with MCI as they might cause confusion about what is happening around them and make communication more difficult. It is advised to get your hearing and eyesight checked regularly. Below are some services where you can seek support:

- You can speak to your GP
- You can book an appointment with an optometrist at places such as Specsavers, Vision Express or Boots Opticians



Assistive Technology

Assistive technology refers to devices or systems that help maintain or improve a person's ability to do things in everyday life. These can assist with a range of difficulties, including problems with memory and mobility.

Assistive technology ranges widely from items like:

- Electric pill boxes (that remind you to take medication)
- 'Smart home' systems (that you can instruct to turn up the heating or switch off the lights)
- Trackers for personal belongings such as keys
- Easy-to-use TV remote controls

You can use technology in a variety of ways, such as helping with everyday tasks and activities, improving your safety and monitoring your health. It can help you with memory problems, mobility, communication, keeping safe inside/outside of home and problems with planning.

You can find advice and information about available and suitable assistive technology for you from the services below:

Tec Mates – Our local West Essex Community Action Network

programme to support the use and uptake of Digital Technology and Technology Enabled Care (TEC) products and services

Tel: **0333 340 1727**

Website: <https://westessexcan.org/tec-mates/>

This project was set up by our local NHS and Social Care, and project staff can visit you at home to advise you on what technology could help you. Please give them a call!

TechSilver - provides gadgets designed to make life easier, safer, and happier

Tel: **0330 010 1418**

Website: <https://www.techsilver.co.uk>

Living Made Easy - provides free impartial advice and information on solutions, gadgets, adaptations, and aids to make life easier

Tel: **0300 999 004**

Email: info@dlf.org.uk

Website: <https://livingmadeeasy.org.uk>

AbilityNet - offers anyone living with any disability or impairment support with using technology

Tel: **0800 048 7642**

Website: <https://abilitynet.org.uk>

Managing Your Emotions

For some people having MCI can mean living with a lot of uncertainty and anxiety. Stress is the sensation of feeling overwhelmed and or unable to cope with mental or emotional pressures. Stress can negatively impact your memory and cognition and make symptoms of MCI worse. It is common that people with memory problems worry over their memory.

However, excessive worry about your cognitive challenges can cause additional stress and this, in turn, can make it harder for you to think clearly and remember. Therefore, you should aim to reduce stress in your life. Practicing breathing exercises and sleeping well can help you manage this.

The link between cognitive impairment and depression is complex. Research has shown that depression and anxiety represent possible risk factors for cognitive decline, impairment in activities of daily living and progression to dementia. It is also known that people with MCI are at an increased risk of having depression compared to people without cognitive impairment. Depression and anxiety tend to make memory or thinking problems worse, low mood can make it harder to engage with activities that are stimulating for the brain. Low mood can have an impact on your wellbeing and cognition as you may have negative thoughts and feelings which can lead you to feeling unmotivated to go out or participate in activities.

In your personalised care plan assessment, we can discuss your emotional wellbeing and any worries or questions you might have in relation to this.

If you are diagnosed with depression, you can request treatment. Treatment may consist of either medication or talking therapies, or both from the following services:

- Your GP
- NHS 111 - Option 2 for urgent care
- The Samaritans if you need someone to talk to - call **116 123** or **0330094 5717**
- NHS Talking Therapies (IAPT services) VitaHealth - you can self-refer

on their website (<https://www.vitahealthgroup.co.uk/nhs-services/nhs-mental-health/west-essex/>) or you can call them on **0333 015 2966**

Managing Loneliness and Isolation

Loneliness and isolation can have a negative impact on your mental health. Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, the rates of loneliness and isolation have greatly increased. If you are feeling lonely or isolated, this could also be contributing to your memory and thinking problems.

Below are some services who can offer advice, information and support for loneliness and isolation:

You could speak to your GP surgery's Social Prescriber about learning more about the available options in your area.

- **A Health and Wellbeing Coach** can refer you to available services in your area and help you with some practical tips – you can ask to be referred for this service through your GP or any other health professional
- Explore **local community groups** – This can also be a fun way for you to socialise with people from your local area

The FRONTLINE websites are a great source of information about all our local Health and Wellbeing services in West Essex. You can find out about all local clubs & community groups, charities and Health and Social Care services at the three Frontline websites for West Essex:

<https://uttlesfordfrontline.org.uk>

<https://harlowfrontline.org.uk>

<https://www.epingforestfrontline.org.uk>

Mindfulness

Mindfulness is a meditation-style technique used to focus the mind on the present moment. Mindfulness means that you are taking your time and slowing down to really notice what you are doing, and what is going on around you. Mindfulness is the opposite of trying to do too

many things at once, or trying to do things in a rush. Mindfulness means knowing directly what is going on inside and outside ourselves, moment by moment. It allows us to see the present moment clearly. When we do that, it can positively change the way we see ourselves and our lives. Gradually, we can train ourselves to notice when our anxious thoughts are taking over and realise that thoughts are simply 'mental events' that do not have to control us.

Practicing mindfulness can reduce stress, increase relaxation, improve awareness and attention and can help you gain further insight into your own wellbeing. Additionally, long-term mindfulness practice may be associated with cognitive and functional improvements for older adults with MCI. Mindfulness training could be an effective non-pharmaceutical therapeutic intervention for MCI.

For more information about how to practice mindfulness you can visit: <https://www.nhs.uk/mental-health/self-help/tips-and-support/mindfulness/>

Volunteering

Volunteering has been shown to be beneficial to the mental health of individuals. It can improve overall mental health and also help to protect from mental health problems.

Some of the benefits of volunteering include:

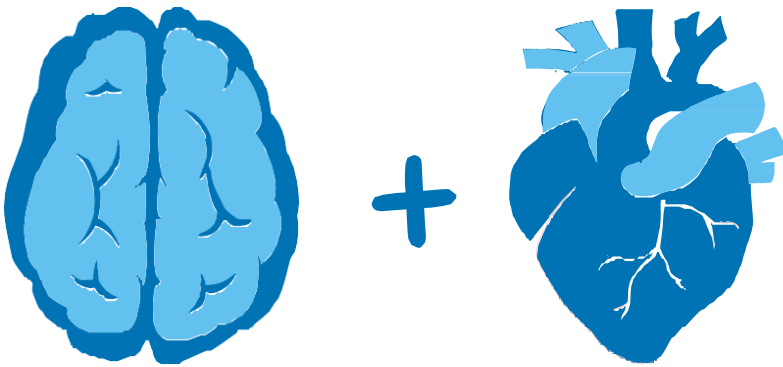
- Providing structure and routine
- Helping people feel good about themselves
- Improving feelings of self-esteem
- Providing opportunities to make friends and take part in social activities
- Providing learning opportunities which can protect mental health

Voluntary Action Epping Forest is an independent charity offering various volunteering opportunities. VAEF runs a number of projects in the Epping Forest district and surrounding areas. If you would like to get involved you can visit their website www.vaef.org.uk where you can read

about the projects they are running and how to get involved.

VAEF also have a project running across Harlow with volunteering opportunities. You can find more information on: <https://www.volunteercentreharlow.org.uk/> or call **07910 075101**.

For volunteering opportunities in Uttlesford you can visit this website: <https://volunteeruttlesford.org.uk/>. Volunteer Uttlesford is actively pursuing several projects in which volunteers are helping to serve their local communities. You can also call on **01799 510525** or email volunteer@volunteeruttlesford.org.uk for help.



Coping with Cognitive Difficulties

Having a regular routine can help to minimise memory problems. Use calendars and diaries, or reminders on an electronic device, to help you remember appointments and important events. Try to break down tasks into small steps if you are struggling, focus on just one step at a time. Similarly, always try to keep items in the same place as it will make them easier to find. By taking all these steps it is possible to manage but also reduce the risks for both MCI and dementia.

Recent evidence shows that a combined programme of approaches, rather than any one approach alone, can help to improve or maintain mental abilities in people with MCI. These approaches include medical treatment for vascular risk factors (a heart condition, diabetes or high blood pressure), physical activity, learning strategies to improve

memory and thinking, and receiving and following advice on memory, health and diet.

It is strongly recommended that you **keep active, both mentally** (e.g. doing puzzles, reading) **and socially** (e.g. seeing friends). Learning new things builds up pathways in our brains, which gives the brain more 'reserve'. Some examples to keep mentally active are to do harder puzzles, such as word searches, jigsaw puzzles and picking up a new sport/activity.

Another way you can keep your brain healthy is to be socially active. For example, you can have a friend over for tea/coffee and you can participate in local activities. People who tend to be more social are also less likely to be anxious or have depression and are more likely to be stimulated.

Socialising increases feelings of well-being, which usually improves a person's mood.

MCI and Driving

MCI can affect a person's driving, but drivers diagnosed with MCI do not always have to tell the DVLA about their condition.

If a person with MCI finds their driving is affected by their MCI symptoms, they must tell the DVLA about this. A person's close family, friends or healthcare professional may be good judges of their driving and can also tell the DVLA if needed.

Although not everyone with MCI is required to let the DVLA know, it is important that you check with your car insurance company to see if you need to let them know. This is to make sure that you are covered in the event of an accident.

DVLA Medical Enquiries

Tel: **0300 790 6806**

MCI and Employment

People who receive a diagnosis of MCI may be in employment. Employers are legally required to make adjustments, where possible, to support you in your role. The Equality Act 2010 says that employees must not be discriminated against based on a disability.

Depending on your personal situation you may wish to continue working. You may find that staying active at work is better for your physical and emotional well-being. Working with MCI depends on your personal circumstances and the nature of your symptoms or difficulties.

Below are support services that can help you with questions you might have relating to your employment:

- **Citizen Advice Bureau**

Epping Forest:

Website: <http://www.citizensadviceefd.org.uk/>

Email: hello@citizensadviceefd.org.uk

Tel: **0800 278 7855** (telephone service is offered first)

Harlow:

Website: <https://www.harlowcitizensadvice.org.uk/>

Tel: **0808 278 7856**

Uttlesford:

Website: <http://www.uttlesfordcab.org.uk/>

Tel: **01799 618840**

Planning Ahead

After being diagnosed with an MCI you may start to think about the future and your wishes. For all of us there might come a time when we are no longer able to make certain decisions for ourselves. It can be upsetting to think this far ahead, but now is a good time to think about and plan legal matters.



Making a Lasting Power of Attorney (LPA) allows you to give someone you trust, such as a family member or close friend, the authority to make decisions on your behalf. To set one up you will need to have 'mental capacity' at that time. Therefore it is a good idea to make these arrangements now. Health and Welfare LPA covers decisions about your healthcare and welfare, such as your daily routine, medical care, life sustaining treatment and moving into a care home. It can only be used if you are unable, even with support, to make your own decisions. Property and Financial Affairs LPA covers decisions about your money, property and affairs, such as paying bills, managing your bank account and selling your home. It can be used, with your permission, as soon as it is registered with the Office of the Public Guardian.

You can apply online for an LPA at www.gov.uk/power-of-attorney

The Office of the Public Guardian can advise you on deciding whether to make a lasting Power of Attorney.

You can call them on **0300 456 0300** or email them on customerservices@publicguardian.gov.uk

Carers' Needs

People living with MCI may have the support of family carers, or may themselves be carers. Caring for someone with disabilities can be a challenging role. If you now care for a relative or friend this can be a big change in your relationship and roles. All families and friendships have their own dynamics - some people might find these changes in roles easier to adapt to, others may find it harder. Most carers find that it's a 'job' that comes with many challenges but also many rewards. It is important for carers to take time to think about the impact that your caring role is having on you, and to make sure that you also take care of yourself.

The following services will support you with these changes, helping you to look after each other and yourselves:

Carers' Assessments

All carers are entitled to a carer's assessment. This looks at the care you give to your relative or friend and also looks at the other demands on you: work, other family needs and your own health. A carer's assessment can be carried out by staff from Essex Social Care and their contact number for Essex is **0345 603 7630**.

Carer Charities

Carers First is the organisation for carers in West Essex. Their phone number is **0300 303 155** and their website is **www.carersfirst.org.uk**.

Action for Family Carers provide a range of support for carers. They offer practical and emotional support, information on financial and legal matters and training for carers. Contact them on **0300 770 8090**.

Community Agents

Community Agents Essex is a network of agents and volunteers, based in local communities, who can visit your home to provide support with promoting health and independent, with reducing loneliness and isolation and with practical solutions to daily living.

To arrange a free visit, call or email:

Tel: **0300 303 9988** Email: **livewell.linkwell@nhs.net**

Alzheimer's Society

Alzheimer's Society provide support to carers of people with MCI. You can call them on **0333 150 3456** for further information and support. Their lines are open:

Mon to Weds: 9am – 8pm

Thurs and Fri: 9am – 5pm

Sat and Sun: 10am – 4pm

Carers Health and Wellbeing

If you are a carer who is experiencing high levels of stress you can get support from these services:

- The Samaritans if you need someone to talk to - call **116 123** or **0330094 5717**
- NHS Counselling Service, Talking Therapies (IAPT services) VitaMinds - You can call them on **0333 015 2966** or you can self-refer on their website (<https://www.vitahealthgroup.co.uk/nhs-services/nhs-mental-health/west-essex/>)

All of the health and wellbeing services for people with MCI that we have talked about in this leaflet are also available to support family carers. It is important that you also take care of yourselves and reach out to services to support you with finding social, leisure, health promotion options.

Get involved with research

People might choose to take part in health or social care research for many reasons:

- You could help improve health and social care for others, as well as give hope for future generations.
- You might be able to try a new treatment or device.
- You might learn more about your condition.
- You will help researchers learn important new information

If you would like to get involved with research please contact the Research Team on 01992 938463.

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

If you have any concerns or need advice about accessing NHS services, you can speak in confidence to the Patient Advice and Liaison Service on [0800 085 7935](tel:08000857935) or you can email epunft.pals@nhs.net

This leaflet can be produced in large print, CD, Braille and other languages on request.

Essex Partnership University NHS Foundation Trust regards equality and diversity as integral to the way it works. Our staff will ensure that everyone is treated fairly and no one is discriminated against on the basis of their ethnicity, gender, disability, age, sexual orientation and religion or belief.



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