

# Mild memory and thinking problems in Parkinson's

**M**ild memory and thinking problems can be a normal part of getting older. Although sometimes, these problems are caused by Parkinson's.

**This information describes these symptoms and some of the possible causes. It also gives helpful tips and advice for people living with these symptoms.**

## What are mild memory and thinking problems?

This is when you have symptoms such as forgetfulness, problems concentrating and difficulty making decisions, but you can still manage your day-to-day life.

Mild memory and thinking problems are common in Parkinson's and can happen at any stage of the condition, but not everyone with Parkinson's has these symptoms.

If you do experience these symptoms, your doctor may describe it as 'mild cognitive impairment' (MCI).

It's normal to worry if you're experiencing memory and thinking problems, but it doesn't necessarily mean you have dementia, or that you will develop it in the future.

Dementia in Parkinson's is diagnosed when thinking and memory problems are steadily getting worse over time and affect everyday life and daily tasks such as cooking, cleaning and dressing.

**Find out more:** [see our information on Parkinson's dementia.](#)

## What are the symptoms?

You might have problems with activities such as planning, multitasking and moving quickly from one activity to another, or doing tasks in a particular

order. This may mean you feel less efficient or less organised than you used to be, or you may get confused, particularly if you're feeling stressed.

Problems with attention and concentration can also make everyday activities more difficult, such as reading a newspaper article from start to finish.

You might experience slowed thinking, so it could take you longer to make decisions or respond to questions.

If you've had surgery for Parkinson's, such as deep brain stimulation, you may have some specific symptoms, such as problems with talking, concentration and complex thinking. But some people find that the surgery improves their memory.

**Find out more:** [see our information on surgery and Parkinson's.](#)

## What are the causes?

Researchers are working to understand why mild memory and thinking problems happen in Parkinson's.

It's thought that these symptoms are caused by problems in the brain pathways that pass messages from one area of the brain to another.

There may also be other explanations for these symptoms. These include:

### Anxiety and depression

Anxiety and depression are quite common in Parkinson's and can have a big impact on your ability to think, remember and deal with information properly. These conditions can also affect your attention span and concentration.

**Find out more:** [see our information on depression and Parkinson's and anxiety and Parkinson's.](#)

### Sleep problems

Difficulty sleeping at night can cause you to feel very sleepy during the day. Some Parkinson's medication can also make you feel sleepy.

If you're feeling tired or run down, this can affect your thinking, concentration and memory.

**Find out more:** [see our information on sleep and night-time problems in Parkinson's.](#)

### Diet and general health

It's also important to eat a healthy, balanced diet and get all the vitamins you need, as this can improve your general health.

Keeping hydrated is also very important as dehydration can affect your concentration.

**Find out more:** [see our information on diet and Parkinson's.](#)

Common health problems such as infections, vitamin deficiencies and thyroid problems can affect memory and thinking, and low blood pressure (hypotension) can cause confusion. All of these conditions are treatable.

## What can be done about mild memory and thinking problems?

It's important to tell your specialist or Parkinson's nurse about any thinking or memory problems you're having.

They can look at your medical history and how long these problems have been going on, then discuss treatment options with you.

Your Parkinson's nurse can also do some cognitive tests. These are pen-and-paper tests that assess your memory and thinking. The results of these tests can reveal the exact nature of the problem.

Some types of Parkinson's drugs help with memory and thinking problems, but others can make these symptoms worse. Your specialist can adjust your Parkinson's medication if necessary.

Don't stop or change your medication regime yourself – always speak to your specialist or Parkinson's nurse if you are having any issues.

There are also non-drug treatments that can help with memory and thinking problems, such as occupational therapy. Occupational therapists aim to make everyday tasks more manageable for you, using strategies, techniques, gadgets, equipment and other tools.

**Find out more:** see our information on occupational therapy.

## What can I do to manage these symptoms?

If you find that mild memory and thinking problems are starting to affect your daily life, there are tips and techniques that might help.

### Visual prompts

Having calendars, clocks, noticeboards and notices around your home may help jog your memory.

### Routine and being organised

Having a clear daily routine can be helpful. Being as organised as possible can help you stay focused and reduce stress.

You might find it helps to keep a list of things to do. You can see what you have achieved as you tick off each task.

Remember that sometimes it helps if you slow down and tackle one thing at a time, rather than trying to do multiple things at once.

Prioritise the things you have to do and the things you want to do, and choose which things you can leave for later.

Giving your undivided attention to whatever you're doing can help you avoid mistakes. This can reduce stress and help you feel in control.

### Memory aids

- A 'memory basket' will help you keep things like your keys, wallet and glasses in one place.
- Drug dispensers and pill timers can be a useful reminder to take your medication, as it's important to take it at the times advised by your specialist or Parkinson's nurse.
- Most mobile phones have alarm settings that can be used to remind you to take your medication and attend appointments.
- Keep a diary of your symptoms. This can help you explain any problems when you see your healthcare professionals.

**Find out more:** see our information on monitoring your parkinson's.

### Keeping it simple

If you're having difficulty remembering or following conversations, ask people to speak and explain things as clearly and simply as possible. They can also help you by providing information in different ways. For example, they could write messages down for you, if this helps.

### Maintaining independence and keeping active

You may need some help with certain things, but try to stay as independent as you can when going about your day-to-day life. It's important to keep as physically and mentally active as possible, through exercise, hobbies and taking part in social activities.

Researchers have found that doing two and a half hours of exercise a week can slow down the progression of Parkinson's symptoms. The best exercises to do will depend on how your Parkinson's affects you.

There's lots of information about keeping active on our website [parkinsons.org.uk](http://parkinsons.org.uk) and our local groups may have regular activities you can get involved in.

To find out what's available in your area use our online service finder [localsupport.parkinsons.org.uk](http://localsupport.parkinsons.org.uk) or call our helpline on **0808 800 0303**.

### Driving

For many people, mild memory and thinking problems will not affect their driving. However, if your symptoms do affect your ability to drive safely, you'll need to inform the DVLA or DVA, who will then assess you.

This does not necessarily mean you'll have to stop driving. Your GP or Parkinson's nurse can advise on whether you need to contact the DVLA/DVA.

There are driving assessment centres across the UK that assess driving safety. These centres aren't run by the DVLA or DVA, but they do follow the recommendations of the assessors at these centres.

**Find out more:** see our information on driving and Parkinson's.

## What can I do at work?

If you're still working, you may find it useful to adapt your working environment.

Simple but effective changes include:

- keeping your work space tidy
- focusing on one task at a time
- reducing distractions when doing complex tasks

Your employer has a legal duty to support you with your disability.

In certain circumstances, your employer may agree to make some reasonable adjustments to your job to help you manage and continue working to the best of your ability.

Some people have found that cutting back on their working hours or changing job roles has also made life easier, but this may not be possible for everyone.

**Find out more:** [see our information on work and Parkinson's.](#)

Occupational therapists can also provide advice on how to make your work more manageable.

**Find out more:** [see our information on occupational therapy.](#)

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## More information and support

### Parkinson's nurses

Parkinson's nurses provide expert advice and support to people with Parkinson's and those who care for them. They can also make contact with other health and social care professionals to make sure your needs are met.

The role of the Parkinson's nurse varies. Each will offer different services, aiming to meet local needs. Some nurses are based in the community, whereas others are based in hospital settings.

Many Parkinson's nurses are independent prescribers. This means they can prescribe and make adjustments to medication, so someone with Parkinson's doesn't always need to see their specialist for changes to or queries about their Parkinson's drugs.

Parkinson's nurses may not be available in every area, but your GP or specialist can give you more details on local services.

You can find out more at [parkinsons.org.uk/nurses](https://parkinsons.org.uk/nurses)

### Information and support from Parkinson's UK

You can call our free confidential helpline for general support and information. Call **0808 800 0303** (calls are free from UK landlines and most mobile networks) or email [hello@parkinsons.org.uk](mailto:hello@parkinsons.org.uk).

Our helpline can put you in touch with one of our Parkinson's local advisers, who give one-to-one information and support to anyone affected by Parkinson's. They can also provide links to local groups and services.

Our website [parkinsons.org.uk](https://parkinsons.org.uk) has a lot of information about Parkinson's and everyday life with the condition. You can also find details of your local support team and your nearest local group meeting at [parkinsons.org.uk/localtoyou](https://parkinsons.org.uk/localtoyou)

Visit [parkinsons.org.uk/forum](https://parkinsons.org.uk/forum) to chat to other people with similar experiences on our online discussion forum.

## Thank you

Thank you to everyone who contributed to or reviewed this information, including experts and people affected by Parkinson's.

## Can you help?

At Parkinson's UK, we are totally dependent on donations from individuals and organisations to fund the work that we do. There are many ways that you can help us to support people with Parkinson's.

If you would like to get involved, please contact our Supporter Services team on **0800 138 6593** or visit our website at [parkinsons.org.uk/donate](https://parkinsons.org.uk/donate). Thank you.

## Our information

All of our most up-to-date information is available at [parkinsons.org.uk/information-support](https://parkinsons.org.uk/information-support)

If you'd prefer to read one of our printed leaflets or booklets, find out how to place an order at [parkinsons.org.uk/ordering-resources](https://parkinsons.org.uk/ordering-resources) or by calling **0300 123 3689**.

We make every effort to ensure that our services provide current, unbiased and accurate information. We hope that this will add to any professional advice you receive and help you to make any decisions you may face. Please do continue to talk to your health and social care team if you are worried about any aspect of living with Parkinson's.

If you'd like to find out more about how we put our information together, including references and the sources of evidence we use, please contact us at [publications@parkinsons.org.uk](mailto:publications@parkinsons.org.uk)



## Mild memory and thinking problems in Parkinson's (FS95/2019)

Do you have any feedback about this information? Your comments will help us ensure our resources are as useful and easy to understand as possible. Please return to [Information Content team, Parkinson's UK, 215 Vauxhall Bridge Road, London SW1V 1EJ](https://parkinsons.org.uk), or email [publications@parkinsons.org.uk](mailto:publications@parkinsons.org.uk). Thank you!

### 1. Please choose the option that best fits you.

- I have Parkinson's and was diagnosed in   I care for someone with Parkinson's  
 I have a friend or family member with Parkinson's  I'm a professional working with people with Parkinson's  
 Other (please specify)

### 2. Where did you get this information from?

- GP  Specialist  Parkinson's nurse  Parkinson's UK local group  Parkinson's UK local adviser  
 Ordered directly from us  Call to the helpline  
 Other (please specify)

### 3. Has it answered all your questions?

- Yes, completely  Yes, mostly  Not sure  Partly  Not at all

### 4. How easy was it to understand?

- Very easy  Easy  Not sure  Quite difficult  Very difficult

We're the Parkinson's charity that drives better care, treatments and quality of life.

## Together we can bring forward the day when no one fears Parkinson's.

Parkinson's UK  
215 Vauxhall Bridge Road  
London SW1V 1EJ

Free confidential helpline **0808 800 0303**  
(Monday to Friday 9am–7pm, Saturday 10am–2pm).  
Interpreting available.

NGT Relay **18001 0808 800 0303** (for use with smart phones, tablets, PCs and other devices). For more information see [www.ngts.org.uk](http://www.ngts.org.uk)

[hello@parkinsons.org.uk](mailto:hello@parkinsons.org.uk)  
[parkinsons.org.uk](http://parkinsons.org.uk)

Order code: PKFS95

Last updated October 2019. We review our information within three years.  
Please check our website for the most up-to-date versions of all our information.

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### 5. Has it helped you manage your condition better, or make choices that have improved your life in some way?

It helped a lot    It helped a little    No change    It didn't help    It made things worse

### 6. What is your ethnic background?\*

Asian or Asian British    Black or Black British    Chinese    Mixed    White British    White other  
 Other (please specify)

\*We ask about your ethnicity to ensure our information is reaching a broad range of people. However, this question is optional.

### Want to hear more from us?

I would like a response to my feedback    I would like to be a member of Parkinson's UK  
 I'm interested in joining the Information review group, to offer feedback on Parkinson's UK information

If you've answered yes to any of these options, please complete your details below.

Name

Address

Email

Telephone

How would you prefer us to contact you?    Email    Post    Phone

We will not pass on your details to any other organisation or third party. To find out more, read our privacy policy at [parkinsons.org.uk/termsandconditions](http://parkinsons.org.uk/termsandconditions)