

# MILD MEMORY AND THINKING PROBLEMS IN PARKINSON'S

## Symptoms

Find out more about mild memory and thinking problems in Parkinson's, and advice and tips to manage symptoms



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# MILD MEMORY AND THINKING PROBLEMS IN PARKINSON'S

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Mild 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?

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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?

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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.

Being active for 2.5 hours a week can help manage Parkinson's symptoms, and has a positive impact both physically and mentally.

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.

## More information and support

### Parkinson's nurses

Parkinson's nurses have specialist experience and knowledge of Parkinson's. They can:

- support people coming to terms with their Parkinson's diagnosis
- help people to manage their medication, so they get the best results and fewer side effects
- make referrals to other professionals such as speech and language therapists and physiotherapists

Some nurses are based in the community, such as your GP surgery. Others are based in hospital settings and clinics.

Talk to your GP or specialist for more details on speaking to a Parkinson's nurse.

### Parkinson's UK information and support

You can read our most up-to-date information at **[parkinsons.org.uk](https://parkinsons.org.uk)**. You can order printed information by calling **0330 124 3250** or visiting **[parkinsons.org.uk/orderingresources](https://parkinsons.org.uk/orderingresources)**

If you'd like to speak to someone, our specialist adviser team can provide information about any aspect of living with Parkinson's.

They can talk to you about managing symptoms and medication, social care, employment rights, benefits, how you're feeling, and much more.

Call our team on: **0808 800 0303** or email **[hello@parkinsons.org.uk](mailto:hello@parkinsons.org.uk)**

We'll provide expert information over phone or email or put you in touch with an adviser locally.

If you'd like to meet other people living with Parkinson's in your local area, you can find friendship and support through our network of volunteers and local groups. Go to **[parkinsons.org.uk/localgroups](https://parkinsons.org.uk/localgroups)** or call our helpline to find out more.

Our forum is also a very active space to share and chat with others who really understand, at a time that suits you. Visit **[parkinsons.org.uk/forum](https://parkinsons.org.uk/forum)**

### Thank you

Thank you very much to everyone who contributed to or reviewed this information.

Thanks also to our information review group and other people affected by Parkinson's who provided feedback.

### Feedback

If you have any comments or feedback about our information, please call **0800 138 6593**, email **[feedback@parkinsons.org.uk](mailto:feedback@parkinsons.org.uk)**, or write to us at

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

If you'd like to find out more about how we put our information together, please contact us at **[healthcontent@parkinsons.org.uk](mailto:healthcontent@parkinsons.org.uk)** or visit our website.

### 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 Care team on **0800 138 6593** or visit our website at **[parkinsons.org.uk/donate](https://parkinsons.org.uk/donate)**

Thank you.

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affected by Parkinson's.  
Together we'll find a cure.

**PARKINSON'S<sup>UK</sup>**

Free confidential helpline **0808 800 0303**  
Monday to Friday 9am–6pm, Saturday 10am–2pm  
(interpreting available)  
NGT relay **18001 0808 800 0303**  
(for textphone users only)  
**hello@parkinsons.org.uk**  
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