Mild memory and thinking problems, also known as 'mild cognitive impairment' can affect some people with Parkinson’s.

This information sheet explains the symptoms and some of the possible causes of these problems. It also gives helpful tips and advice on what you can do to make living with mild memory problems a bit easier.

What is mild cognitive impairment?
This is when you have problems recalling things, finding words and making decisions. You may experience this during the earlier stages of Parkinson’s although you may not have any of these issues until a much later stage.

If you are having mild memory problems, you, your family and friends will probably have noticed.

It’s natural to worry about these things. Some people with mild cognitive impairment and Parkinson’s are concerned they may be developing dementia. But this is not always the case. Dementia in Parkinson’s is diagnosed when thinking and memory problems are bad enough to interfere with your ability to undertake daily activities (more than the usual difficulties caused by movement problems in Parkinson’s). If you have mild cognitive impairment you can generally function quite well.

Find out more: see our information sheet Parkinson’s dementia.

What are the symptoms of mild cognitive impairment?
If you have mild cognitive impairment, you may have problems with some activities such as planning, multi-tasking, 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.

Problems with attention and concentration can make daily tasks, such as reading a newspaper article from start to finish, more difficult.
You may experience slower thought processes, so it could take you longer to make decisions or to respond in conversations.

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

What are the causes of mild cognitive impairment?

We still don’t fully understand why thinking and memory problems happen in Parkinson’s. They could be caused by problems in the brain pathways that pass messages from one part of the brain to another.

There may also be other reasons that have nothing to do with Parkinson’s, that could explain why you’re experiencing difficulties with your memory and thinking, or feel like the problem is getting worse. These include:

Anxiety and depression
Anxiety and depression can have a big impact on your ability to think, remember and deal with information properly. They may affect your attention span and concentration, so it’s important to try to find ways to relax. If you are feeling down or depressed, see your GP, specialist or Parkinson’s nurse (if you have one) for help and advice.

Find out more: see our information sheets Depression and Parkinson’s and Anxiety and Parkinson’s.

Sleep problems
Difficulties in sleeping can lead to excessive daytime sleepiness. Some Parkinson’s medication can also make you feel sleepy. If you’re feeling tired or run down, this may affect your thinking, concentration and memory.

Talk to your GP, specialist or Parkinson’s nurse about ways to deal with any sleep problems.

Find out more: see our booklet Sleep and night-time problems in Parkinson’s.

Diet and general health

It’s important to make sure you’re eating a healthy diet and getting all the vitamins you need, as this will improve your general health. Common health problems, particularly in older people, can cause difficulties with thinking and memory problems but are easily treated. Speak to your GP, specialist or Parkinson’s nurse for more information.

Find out more: see our booklet Diet and Parkinson’s.

What can be done about mild cognitive impairment?

Some Parkinson’s medications, particularly levodopa, may improve memory and concentration. But, in some cases, levodopa may cause confusion. Anticholinergic drugs and dopamine agonists may also have a negative impact on thinking clearly, particularly in older people with more serious thinking and memory problems.

It’s important to tell your specialist or Parkinson’s nurse about any thinking or memory problems you’re having. They’ll be able to adjust your Parkinson’s medication if necessary, advise you about services and other health professionals, such as occupational therapists, who may be able to help.

There are no specific medications to treat mild cognitive impairment in Parkinson’s. The medication used for Alzheimer’s has not proved helpful for people with Parkinson’s who do not have dementia. If you or your family are concerned that your symptoms are getting worse, it may be possible to get some tests done with a psychologist.
This usually involves paper-and-pencil tests of memory, attention, concentration and other aspects of thinking. The results of these tests may reveal the exact nature of the problems.

A psychologist may also be able to offer you advice on ways to help to improve your memory. Speak to your GP, specialist or Parkinson’s nurse and ask about being referred.

**Will I still be able to work?**

If you’re still working, it may be necessary to adapt your working environment. Simple but effective changes include keeping your workplace uncluttered, trying to focus on one task at a time and reducing distractions when doing complex tasks. Occupational therapists are often very helpful in giving this type of advice. See your GP, specialist or Parkinson’s nurse about getting referred.

You may find it useful to rely more on colleagues for organisation and time keeping. You could also ask them to limit instructions to one task at a time.

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

**Helpful tips and advice**

If you find that thinking and memory problems are starting to affect your daily life, there are tips and techniques you can use to help, including the following:

**Visual prompts**

Having calendars, clocks, noticeboards and notices around the home may help jog your memory and provide helpful reminders. You may find it helps to keep a list of things to do. You can see what you have achieved as you tick off each task.

**Routine and organisation**

Being as organised as possible may help you stay focused and keep stress to a minimum. Avoiding change in your daily routine, as far as you can, may also be helpful.

“*I believe that if you keep your brain active, it will help in the long term. I love quizzes, puzzles and computer games.*”

Steve, diagnosed in 1999

**Memory aids**

- A ‘memory basket’, will help you to keep your keys, wallet, glasses etc all in one place.
- Medication dispensers and pill timers can be useful to help remind you when to take your medication as it’s important to take it at the times advised by your specialist or Parkinson’s nurse. There are pill dispensers and timers available on the Parkinson’s UK website at parkinsons.org.uk/shop
- Most mobile phones have alarm settings that can be used to remind you to take your medication and for appointments.

**Keeping it simple**

If you’re having difficulty remembering or following conversations, ask people to keep explanations as clear and simple as possible. Others can also help you by providing information in several different ways. For example, they could write messages down for you as well as talking to you face to face.

**Maintaining independence**

It’s important to keep your memory and thinking as active as possible. Try as much as you can to keep your hobbies going and to take part in social activities. You could try some mental stimulation, such as doing crosswords or sudoku. You may need some help, but try to stay as independent as possible when going about your day-to-day life.
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 act as a liaison between other health and social care professionals to make sure your needs are met.

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

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
We now run a Peer Support Service if you’d like to talk on the phone with someone affected by Parkinson’s who has faced similar issues to you. The service is free and confidential – ring the helpline and they will match you with a peer support volunteer.

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

Our website has information about your local support team and how to contact them at parkinsons.org.uk/localtoyou. You can find details of our local groups and your nearest meeting at parkinsons.org.uk/localgroups. You can also visit parkinsons.org.uk/forum to speak with other people in a similar situation on our online discussion forum.
Thank you very much to everyone who contributed to or reviewed this information sheet:

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Choo Wright, Parkinson's Disease Nurse Specialist, Redhill, Surrey.

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

Mild memory problems

If you have comments or suggestions about this information sheet, we'd love to hear from you. This will help us ensure that we are providing as good a service as possible. We'd be very grateful if you could complete this form and return it to Resources and Diversity, Parkinson's UK, 215 Vauxhall Bridge Road, London SW1V 1EJ. Or you can email us at publications@parkinsons.org.uk. Thanks!

Please tick...

☐ I have Parkinson's. When were you diagnosed? ..............................................................................................................................................................

☐ I'm family/a friend/a carer of someone with Parkinson's

☐ I'm a professional working with people with Parkinson's

Where did you get this information sheet from?

☐ GP, specialist or Parkinson's nurse

☐ Information and support worker

☐ Parkinson's UK local group or event

☐ Ordered from us directly

☐ Our website

☐ Other ..............................................................................................................................................

How useful have you found the information sheet? (1 is not useful, 4 is very useful) ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4

Have you found the publication easy to read/use? ☐ Yes ☐ No
We’re the Parkinson’s support and research charity. Help us find a cure and improve life for everyone 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 020 7932 1303 or visit our website at parkinsons.org.uk/support. Thank you.

Parkinson’s UK
Free* confidential helpline 0808 800 0303
Monday to Friday 9am–8pm, Saturday 10am–2pm. Interpreting available.
Text Relay 18001 0808 800 0303
(for textphone users only)
hello@parkinsons.org.uk
parkinsons.org.uk
*Calls are free from UK landlines and most mobile networks.

How to order our resources
0845 121 2354
resources@parkinsons.org.uk
Download them from our website at parkinsons.org.uk/publications

We make every effort to make sure that our services provide up-to-date, unbiased and accurate information. We hope that this will add to any professional advice you receive and will 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.

References for this information sheet can be found in the Microsoft Word version at parkinsons.org.uk/publications

Has this resource given you information that might help you manage your condition better?
☐ NA ☐ It hasn't helped ☐ It has helped a little ☐ It has helped a lot

What aspects did you find most helpful?
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Were you looking for any information that wasn't covered?
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Do you have any other comments?
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If you would like to become a member of Parkinson’s UK, or are interested in joining our information review group, please complete the details below and we’ll be in touch.

☐ Membership ☐ Information review group (who give us feedback on new and updated resources)

Name ..........................................................................................................................................................................................
Address ..........................................................................................................................................................................................
Telephone ______________________________ Email ______________________________
What is your ethnic background?
☐ Asian or Asian British ☐ Black or Black British ☐ Chinese ☐ Mixed
☐ White British ☐ White other ☐ Other (please specify).............................................................................................................

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