

# Memory, Forgetfulness, and Aging:

## What's Normal and What's Not?



What's the difference between normal, age-related forgetfulness and a serious memory or cognitive problem?

Normal age-related memory loss is a gradual decline in memory function that occurs as people get older. This is not the same as mild cognitive impairment (MCI), which is a slight decline in cognitive function, such as memory, language or thinking skills, and can be an early sign of dementia. Below are some ways to differentiate between these stages:

	Normal Aging	MCI	Dementia
<b>Memory Problems</b>	You remember important events but may forget an appointment from time to time.	You can remember important events with the help of calendars, notes, and lists.	You cannot remember important events and you forget recently learned information.
<b>Impaired Thinking Skills</b>	You lose things from time to time.	You are misplacing things often and not able to find them.	You are putting things in strange places and unable to retrace your steps to find them.
<b>Language Difficulties</b>	You sometimes forget which word to use.	You have trouble having conversations or keeping up with the flow of a conversation.	You have trouble verbalizing thoughts and have frequent pauses in conversation. You repeat phrases or questions.
<b>Disorientation in Time &amp; Space</b>	You forget which day it is but remember later. You may pause to remember directions, but you don't get lost in familiar places.	You lose track of the date and time of year. You occasionally get lost in familiar places.	You regularly lose track of the day or season and forget where you are and how you got there, even in familiar places.
<b>Mood</b>	You have some difficulty adapting to changes in a particular routine.	You get irritated when your normal routine is altered but you can adapt.	You get extremely agitated by a change in routine and it is difficult for you to adapt.
<b>Judgement</b>	Your judgement and decision making are not impaired.	You sometimes make poor or impulsive decisions.	You regularly make poor decisions and are unable to understand the consequences of your actions.



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