



April 2024

My Spouse was Diagnosed with MCI



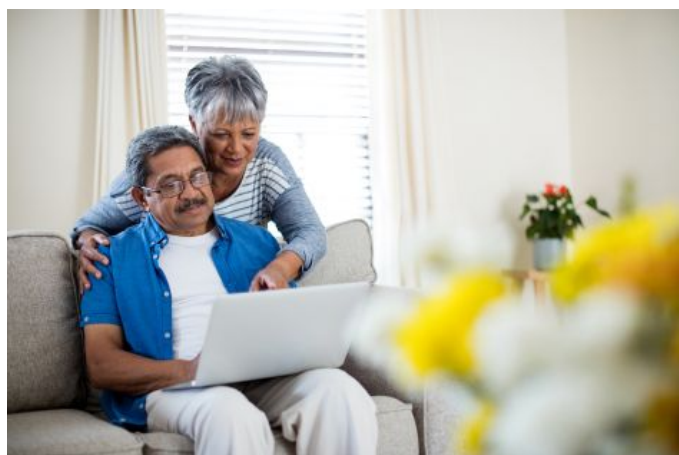
MCI is the acronym for Mild Cognitive Impairment. It does not mean “Dementia” at this stage. A large percentage of those with this diagnosis never progress further than short-term memory loss. Research has shown with lifestyle changes, improvements in cognition are possible.

However, any new diagnosis often comes with stress and worry about the future. Many individuals think they have a dementia, like Alzheimer’s disease; but while MCI can progress to a dementia, that is not the case at this point of the journey.

Lifestyle Changes After an MCI Diagnosis

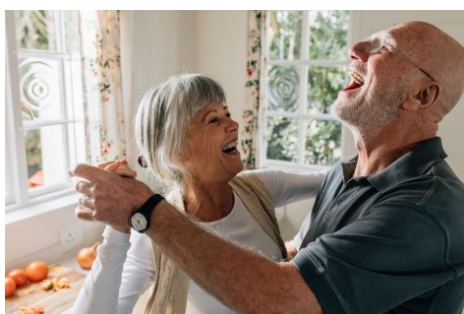
Worry and stress are negatives for a healthy brain. It is imperative to take this as an opportunity to make some lifestyle changes that will reduce stress and could keep the brain healthy, possibly even arresting the progression of MCI.

This is an important time for couples not to put their “heads in the sand,” as the saying goes, but instead to take action and do some practical planning together. Taking these steps will be helpful for whatever the future holds.



1. **Share the responsibilities of running a household.** Traditionally, we all have our roles in our relationships but with this diagnosis, it is a time to share how to run the household; which includes, finances, medications, taking care of the garden or pets, and even how to cook some simple meals.
2. **Update legal documents.** It is important to make sure your Trust or Advance Health Directives are up-to-date. It is critical if the person with MCI is the only other decision maker that you add additional decision makers for not only the well spouse but also for the spouse with MCI.
3. **Learn as much as you can about the “Healthy Brain” and MCI.** If you have dementia in your family, you might want to have genetic testing to see if it is even more important for you to make these changes. Changing your lifestyle is not easy, but after about six weeks, it will become the new routine.
4. **Make lifestyle changes together:**
 - [A positive attitude towards aging](#) can have a great impact on the brain. The American Medical Association’s research last year found that even those with a genetic link to dementia who had a positive outlook toward aging were able to reverse their MCI diagnosis. So, if you’re thinking, “Aging is the pits,” that will not help you. A positive outlook on aging includes looking at this stage of life as an opportunity to give back, travel, learn new skills, and enjoy each day.

- The best diet for those with MCI to follow is the [Mediterranean Diet](#). The healthy fats from foods like salmon, olive oil, avocados, and walnuts are important for brain health. Try to add a little to every meal. The Mediterranean diet also emphasizes replacing processed foods with whole foods.
- Make it a daily goal to exercise for 30 minutes. Add some resistance, weight training, and balance work to your routine. Join a class and make it fun, walk with a friend or your partner. Look for the “awe” in every day.
- Make social engagement a priority. This is not just for your brain health, but it adds years to your life. Be a part of a group that meets regularly. You can likely find groups at senior centers, libraries, Rotary (or other service organizations), or places like [Lamorinda Village](#). Continue to be in touch with family and friends but add more to the calendar. Volunteering just about anywhere is both good for your health and another way to stay socially engaged.
- Learning new skills and playing brain games is a boost to brain health.
- Work on getting 7–8 hours of sleep each night without medications. Sleep is the time memory processing is working.
- Practice mindfulness; find some time each day to just “be” – quiet the mind. Listen to music, sit in a garden, color with markers, or doing another art project. All of these can be a way to lose yourself and empty the mind. One can use yoga, prayer, meditation recordings, or apps on your phone like Calm.



The above lifestyle changes are going to benefit both the spouse with MCI and the care partner. Stress is part of life but when you focus on the positives, it becomes manageable and allows for joy.

Affirmation: “Love is tough, and I care for myself in order to love others.”

Resources:

[Mediterranean Diet](#)

[Lamorinda Village](#)

[Calm App](#)