

How to tell apart the forgetful from those at risk of Alzheimer's disease

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It can be difficult to distinguish between people with normal age-associated memory loss and those with amnesic mild cognitive impairment (aMCI). However people with aMCI are at a greater risk of developing Alzheimer's disease (AD), and identification of these people would mean that they could begin treatment as early as possible. New research published in BioMed Central's open access journal *BMC Geriatrics* shows that specific questions, included as part of a questionnaire designed to help diagnose AD, are also able to discriminate between normal memory loss and aMCI.

Loss of memory can be distressing for the person affected and their families and both the patient and people who know them may complain about their memory as well as difficulties in their daily lives. However [memory problems](#) can be a part of normal aging and not necessarily an indicator of incipient dementia. A [pilot study](#) had indicated that a simple, short, questionnaire (AQ), designed to identify people with AD by using informant-reported symptoms, was also able to recognize people with aMCI.

The AQ consists of 21 yes/no questions designed to be answered by a relative or carer in a primary care setting. The questions fall into five categories: memory, orientation, functional ability, visuospatial ability, and language. Six of these questions are known to be predictive of AD and are given extra weighting, resulting in a score out of 27. A score above 15 was indicative of AD, and between 5 and 14 of aMCI. Scores of 4 or lower indicate that the person does not have significant memory

problems.

While validating the AQ researchers from Banner Sun Health Research Institute discovered that four of the questions were strong indicators of aMCI. Psychometrist Michael Malek-Ahmadi, who led the study, explained, "People with aMCI were more often reported as repeating questions and statements, having trouble knowing the date or time, having difficulties managing their finances and a decreased sense of direction." He continued, "While the AQ cannot be used as a definitive guide to diagnosing AD or aMCI, it is a quick and simple-to-use indicator that may help physicians determine which individuals should be referred for more extensive testing."

More information: Informant-reported cognitive symptoms that predict amnesic mild cognitive impairment. Michael Malek-Ahmadi, Kathryn Davis, Christine Belden, Sandra Jacobson and Marwan N Sabbagh. *BMC Geriatrics* (in press)

Provided by BioMed Central

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