

Less fluent speech could be a sign of early memory problems

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Researchers in the US have found that people with very mild memory and thinking problems also show changes in their everyday speech.

In the study, 219 participants from the Wisconsin Registry for Alzheimer's Prevention (WRAP), provided two, one minute, speech samples at points two years apart. 64 people were found to be

experiencing [mild cognitive impairment](#) over a period of 8-10 years. The researchers found small speech differences in participants experiencing early mild cognitive impairment. The findings showed that pauses like "um" and "ah", shorter sentences, and the use of pronouns, were more common in people experiencing the early stages of mild cognitive impairment, which can be a precursor to Alzheimer's disease

Study participants with mild cognitive impairment declined faster on two measures of speech: content and fluency. Those in the healthy group took less time to express the same amount of content as those in the mildly cognitively impaired group. Further research is due to be carried out to repeat analyses, and additionally, researchers will use brain scans to identify tau tangles and amyloid plaques in the participants. They hope this could prove valuable in determining whether this research could be useful in clinical assessments of cognitive function in the future.

Dr Rosa Sancho, Head of Research at Alzheimer's Research UK, said:

"When we hear the word dementia, most people tend not to think beyond memory problems. Communication difficulties are a common symptom of dementia and can be a key challenge for many people living with the condition. This study highlights a pattern of subtle language changes that could be indicative of early memory and thinking problems. A better understanding of the way language changes in dementia could lead to more sensitive tests and earlier, more accurate diagnosis. Not everyone with mild memory problems goes on to develop [dementia](#) so it will be interesting to see researchers explore whether these [speech](#) changes could help identify people who will go on to develop the condition."

Provided by Alzheimer's Research UK

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