

Suffering From MCI or SMI? Here Are Some Helpful Tips From An OT Student

Memory is a very important and impactful skill to have. It affects everything we do in a given day. It can be very scary if you find yourself having a harder time remembering things than you have in the past. This blog will explain the impacts early dementia has on individuals and how one can use compensatory actions to improve their independence.

The Facts:

- The prevalence of dementia in the US in those over the age of 71 is 13.9%, 18.9% for those 71 to 79 years of age, and 37.4% for over the age of 90 (Kempf et al., 2016).
- There are 5 stages of dementia due to Alzheimer's disease. This blog will be focusing on the first stage, the pre-dementia stage.
- Alzheimer's first affects the structures that control short and long term memory. These brain changes can start 10-20 years before signs or symptoms begin to show of Alzheimer's (Kempf et al., 2016). This makes it very important to find strategies that allow you to compensate with memory loss to help you get through the day. However, these strategies will be to manage your symptoms and unfortunately, may not work down the road if cognitive decline does occur.
- Mild Cognitive Impairment (MCI) and Subjective Memory Impairment (SMI) are two very common disorders affecting the memory in the pre-dementia stage.

MCI

- If you find yourself losing things often, forgetting to go to appointments or events, or having more trouble coming up with words compared to others your age, then you are possibly suffering from MCI.
- MCI is typically diagnosed by a doctor once a family or friend notices time lapses or the individual starts to worry about their memory.
- Typically, this is diagnosed as a precursor in developing Alzheimer's ("What is Mild Cognitive Impairment," 2017).

SMI

- SMI is a self-reported experience of frequent confusion or worsening memory loss.
- It is a very common sign to early Alzheimer's.
- This could have an impact on many everyday activities, such as, cooking or cleaning.
- Given that this is self-reported, there is no diagnosis of cognitive decline (Subjective Cognitive Decline, 2019).

Helpful Tips and Methods!

Below is a list of helpful devices that can make your day a little more easier. We want you as independent as possible!

- **Medication Management**

- Automatic Pill Dispenser

- This device is an expensive but helpful device that holds a week's supply of pills and vitamins in a refillable plastic tray. The tray is locked and alarms when the individual must take the medication. It then buzzes until the medicine is removed.
 - Here is a link with 5 options:



- <https://www.top5reviewed.com/automatic-pill-dispensers/>

- Weekly Pill Planner

- The weekly pill planner allows the individual or a caregiver to place the correct pills into each slot that corresponds to the correct day.



- Here is a very affordable one:

- https://www.amazon.com/Weekly-Classic-Organizer-Planner-Medium/dp/B001F5PHNY/ref=zg_bs_3776431_2?encoding=UTF8&pvc=1&refRID=V2AK1ZA1PE51F220KFCF

- Pill Alarms

- Pill alarms sound when the medication needs to be taken. The device can come small enough to fit in one's pocket while others can look like alarm clocks and speak "Time to take your pills!"



- Here is one option: <https://www.amazon.com/MEDCENTER-70942-MedCenter-Talking-Alarm/dp/B00CEZQ9U4>

- Phone Alarms

- If you have an iPhone or Android, you can utilize your phone to set weekly alarms. They can be set to go off on certain times and days of the week and they would only have to be set once!

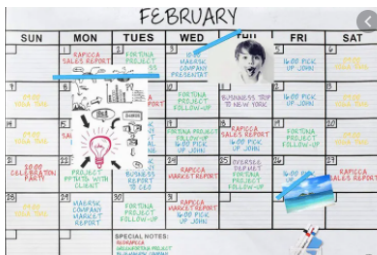
- **Appointment Reminders**

- Large Calendar by the Front Door/On Refrigerator

- Having a large calendar by the front door or on the refrigerator can assist in jogging your memory with what you have planned for the day. Have a family member or friend help you fill it out! A large, whiteboard calendar is always fun to fill in and decorate! The calendar could be monthly or weekly, depending on how you enjoy consolidating your events!

- A great idea for a weekly calendar is to write down everything you want to get done for each day!

- Here is one option: <https://www.amazon.com/Quartet-Calendar-Planner-Magnetic-22476/dp/B008DQY6IK>



- Pocket Calendar

- Get in the habit of writing down an appointment as soon as it is scheduled. Always carry the pocket calendar so that you can check to see what you have going on for the day.

- Here is a list of different options:

https://www.amazon.com/s?k=pocket+calendar&i=office-products&ref=nb_sb_noss_2



- Phone Calendar

- Use your phone to plug in events that you have planned and set it up where it notifies you the day it is occurring. You can set it for 15 minutes before you need to leave so that you stay on schedule!

- **Environmental Modifications**

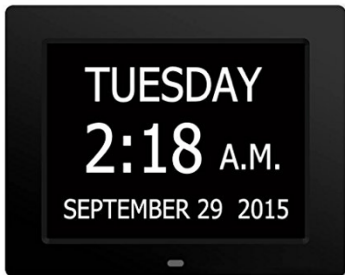
- Install Glass Doors on Cupboards

- This will allow you to see in the cupboards and avoid having to open all of them up to find what you are looking for. This helps save time in the kitchen and cook your food efficiently.

- Create Lists or Photos of What is in Your Cupboards
 - A more affordable option to assist you in the kitchen would be to tape photos or lists to your cupboards so that you know where to find everything. This would avoid having to replace all of the cupboard doors while still knowing what is behind each door without opening all of them up.

- Highlight Cookbook Favorites
 - Use a highlighter to highlight your favorite recipes. This will help when deciding what to make for your meals!

- Digital Calendar/Clock with Non-abbreviated Day and Month
 - It is advised to purchase a digital calendar to assist in orientation to the time, day, month and year. It is an easy cue that you can look at as soon as you wake up and as many times as needed throughout the day. It also allows for 3 daily alarms which can be used for meal reminders.
 - Here is one option:
 - <https://www.amazon.com/dp/B0196GI69U?tag=myotspot-20&linkCode=ogi&th=1&psc=1>



Now, these helpful tips and devices may only help if you are currently struggling with MCI, SMI, or pre-dementia, if cognitive decline does occur, more adaptations and modifications may need to be put in place.

Helpful Services

Occupational therapy services come as a huge benefit for those struggling with memory loss. OT takes a very holistic approach and tackles the problem in various, effective ways. However, it is important to seek out other professions to get an appropriate diagnosis, and to get well-rounded assistance in meeting all of your needs.

- Family and General Practitioners

- These professionals are usually among the first who start the process of diagnosing a patient with dementia. They tend to pick up on early signs of dementia since, typically, they have provided medical care for years to the individual (“Careers Working with Dementia Patients”, 2020).
- Psychologists
 - This profession focuses on human behavior and how the brain works. They can assist in determining what kind of dementia a patient is suffering from (“Careers Working with Dementia Patients”, 2020).
- Home Health Aide
 - These individuals are able to assist in meeting all of your needs from the basis of your home. It is important to consider this profession when cognitive decline starts to occur. They are able to assist in cooking, giving patients their medications, and even taking clients to visit their friends (“Careers Working with Dementia Patients”, 2020).

Occupational Engagement

Memory loss has a huge impact on an individual’s everyday life. It affects their ability to perform their daily tasks, given that something they used to rely on, is now gone. My hope is that my resource is able to positively impact many areas of activity and participation in a given day. For one example, the resources provided above should be able to assist someone during the early stages of dementia with managing their daily routine. The suggested calendars, alarm clocks, and pill dispensers are all ways to make the daily routine just a little bit easier. Why feel defeated and struggle throughout the day when you could implement easy reminders for yourself! Another benefit to using a calendar in your home, specifically a weekly calendar, is to be able to organize your household tasks. Have someone help you organize and write down what you want to get done each day. That way, household chores won’t be forgotten about. With that being said, preparing meals is also a very important task to keep on top of. Implementing kitchen adaptations and meal reminders will assist you in getting your daily nutrition in a smooth manner.

References

Kempf C., Schwarz Lauren., Desai, A., & Perkinson, M. (2016). Cognitive impairment, dementia, and occupational therapy interventions. In *Journal of Cross-Cultural Gerontology* (Eds.), *Occupational therapy with aging adults* (pp. 245-265). Elsevier.

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