

# Memory and Aging:

## Is Memory Decline Normal When We Age?

Timothy P. Lang, Psy.D., L.P.  
Clinical Psychologist  
Department of Psychiatry and  
Psychology  
Austin Medical Center

### Clinical Lore

- Only seniors can have memory problems
- Forgetting is normal when we age
- If you live long enough you will eventually get Alzheimer's
- Nothing can be done about memory problems

## Reality

- Our brains change from birth to death
- Brain structure and functions change
- Our brains are on a downward slope as early as in our 20's
- We can intervene if there is a problem

## Types of Memory

- Immediate
- Recent
- Remote

## Normal Changes in Cognition

- Processing efficiency
- Working memory
- Word finding
- Visual/spatial

## Risk Factors

- Chronic and poorly managed medical conditions (diabetes and cardiovascular)
- Long-term smoking
- Chronic drug or alcohol use
- Family history for memory impairment

## Notable Concerns

- Affects daily living skills
- Affects driving
- Unable to recall previously crystallized info
- Family observations

## Assessment

- Immediate Memory
- Delayed Memory
- Visual/spatial
- Language
- Attention
- Functional Capacity

## Types of Memory Impairment

- Alzheimer's Dementia – typically slow and insidious onset
- Vascular Dementia – related to cardiovascular problems
- Dementia due to other medical conditions – head trauma, HIV, Parkinson's Huntington's
- Substance Induced Persisting Dementia – drug abuse, medication, or toxin exposure

## Types of Memory Impairment

- Mild Cognitive Impairment – thought to be a precursor to developing Alzheimer's. It includes changes in cognition that are mild and no notable changes in ADL's. Recent research indicates that the percentage of patients diagnosed with MCI and progressing to Alzheimer's is lower than expected (13%).

## Options

- Medications from physician
- New living arrangements
- Driving evaluation
- Guardianship/conservatorship

## Questions

- See your physician
- Call AMC 434-1851 for a Memory Clinic appointment