

Mini-Cog Dementia Screener Tutorial

March 2026



Indian Health Service



Objectives



At the end of this session, you will be able to:

- Perform a Mini-Cog
- Guide a person to the next steps if they have a positive screening
- Guide a person to the next steps if they have a negative screening
- Offer brief education on brain health
- Identify when to use the Mini-Cog

The Mini-Cog® is a fast and simple screening test to help detect dementia in its early stages.

In just 3 minutes, Mini-Cog® can help doctors and other professional care providers identify possible cognitive impairment in older patients.

This gives people who are starting to show signs of cognitive impairment a better chance for early diagnosis and care. This could make a big difference in their health and quality of life now and later on.

Mini-Cog® is simple to use and can help determine when more in-depth cognitive evaluation is needed.

It's easy to include in regular wellness exams, primary care visits, other health care settings, and anywhere older adults go to find needed services, such as senior centers and community organizations.

Learning to give the Mini-Cog® takes less than 10 minutes—no special medical knowledge needed.

[LEARN MORE](#)





What is the Mini-Cog?

Watch this video:

https://youtu.be/wPu5IA7jQEM?si=fR1OHZ_bYZI-UAIE



Why use the Mini-Cog or screen at all?



Older Adults Want It

- 95% of older adults want to know about their memory
- 80% of older adults think cognitive assessments are useful
- Few are getting it

Benefits of Early and Timely Detection



- Start lifestyle and other changes early when they will have the most benefit
- Plan for future healthcare and financial decisions
- Get info and education earlier before a crisis or care needs are greatest
- Connection to community and support services before a crisis happens
- Consider medications and other treatments, which almost all work better the earlier dementia is detected

Find Other Treatable Causes of Memory Changes

- Adverse medication interactions and side effects
- Untreated infections or other medical issues
- Depression
- Anxiety
- High levels of stress
- Lack of sleep
- Chronic pain
- Hypothyroidism
- Vitamin deficiency or electrolyte imbalance



Mini-Cog Demonstration

Watch this video:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FiHMiIT4_Pg



Using and Scoring the Mini-Cog



Step 1: Three Word Registration

Look directly at person and say, "Please listen carefully. I am going to say three words that I want you to repeat back to me now and try to remember. The words are [select a list of words from the versions below]. Please say them for me now." If the person is unable to repeat the words after three attempts, move on to Step 2 (clock drawing).

The following and other word lists have been used in one or more clinical studies.^{1,3} For repeated administrations, use of an alternative word list is recommended.

Version 1	Version 2	Version 3	Version 4	Version 5	Version 6
Banana	Leader	Village	River	Captain	Daughter
Sunrise	Season	Kitchen	Nation	Garden	Heaven
Chair	Table	Baby	Finger	Picture	Mountain

Step 2: Clock Drawing

Say: "Next, I want you to draw a clock for me. First, put in all of the numbers where they go." When that is completed, say: "Now, set the hands to 10 past 11."

Use preprinted circle (see next page) for this exercise. Repeat instructions as needed as this is not a memory test. Move to Step 3 if the clock is not complete within three minutes.

Step 3: Three Word Recall

Ask the person to recall the three words you stated in Step 1. Say: "What were the three words I asked you to remember?" Record the word list version number and the person's answers below.

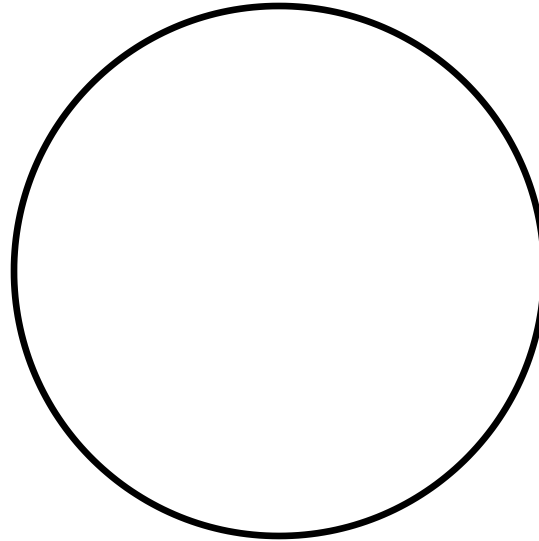
Word List Version: _____ Person's Answers: _____

Scoring

Word Recall: 3 points)	_____ (0-	1 point for each word spontaneously recalled without cueing.
Clock Draw: or 2 points)	_____ (0	Normal clock = 2 points. A normal clock has all numbers placed in the correct sequence and approximately correct position (e.g., 12, 3, 6 and 9 are in anchor positions) with no missing or duplicate numbers. Hands are pointing to the 11 and 2 (11:10). Hand length is not scored. Inability or refusal to draw a clock (abnormal) = 0 points.
Total Score: 5 points)	_____ (0-	Total score = Word Recall score + Clock Draw score. A cut point of <3 on the Mini-Cog™ has been validated for dementia screening, but many individuals with clinically meaningful cognitive impairment will score higher. When greater sensitivity is desired, a cut point of <4 is recommended as it may indicate a need for further evaluation of cognitive status.

Clock Drawing

ID: _____ Date: _____



References

1. Borson S, Scanlan JM, Chen PJ et al. The Mini-Cog as a screen for dementia: Validation in a population based sample. *J Am Geriatr Soc* 2003;51:1451–1454.
2. Borson S, Scanlan JM, Watanabe J et al. Improving identification of cognitive impairment in primary care. *Int J Geriatr Psychiatry* 2006;21: 349–355.
3. Lessig M, Scanlan J et al. Time that tells: Critical clock-drawing errors for dementia screening. *Int Psychogeriatr*. 2008 June; 20(3): 459–470.
4. Tsoi K, Chan J et al. Cognitive tests to detect dementia: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *JAMA Intern Med*. 2015; E1-E9.
5. McCarten J, Anderson P et al. Screening for cognitive impairment in an elderly veteran population: Acceptability and results using different versions of the Mini-Cog. *J Am Geriatr Soc* 2011; 59: 309-213.
6. McCarten J, Anderson P et al. Finding dementia in primary care: The results of a clinical demonstration project. *J Am Geriatr Soc* 2012; 60: 210-217.
7. Scanlan J & Borson S. The Mini-Cog: Receiver operating characteristics with the expert and naive raters. *Int J Geriatr Psychiatry* 2001; 16: 216-222.

Scoring the Mini-Cog



Recall Score (Total Possible Score: 0-3)

- 1 point for each word correctly recalled without prompt

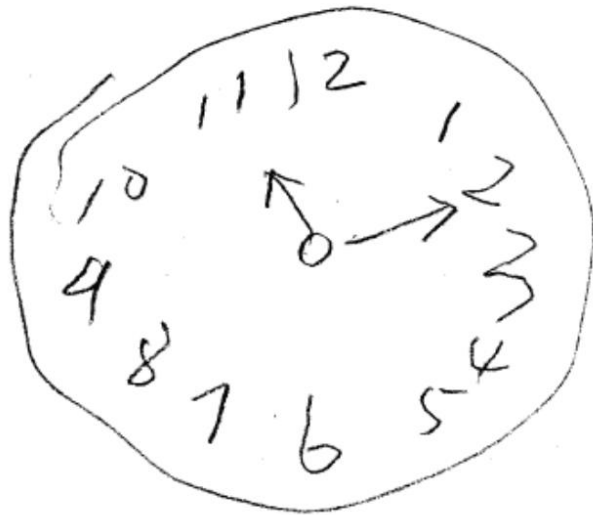
Clock Drawing Score (Total Possible Score: 0-2)

- 2 points for a normal clock or 0 (zero) points for an abnormal clock drawing.
- A normal clock must include all numbers (1-12), each only once, in the correct order and direction (clockwise).
- There must also be two hands present, one pointing to the 11 and one pointing to 2.
- Hand length is not scored in the Mini-Cog© algorithm.

A cut point of <3 on the Mini-Cog™ has been validated for dementia screening, but many individuals with clinically meaningful cognitive impairment will score higher. When greater sensitivity is desired, a cut point of <4 is recommended as it may indicate a need for further evaluation of cognitive status.

Scoring the Mini-Cog

Normal Clock



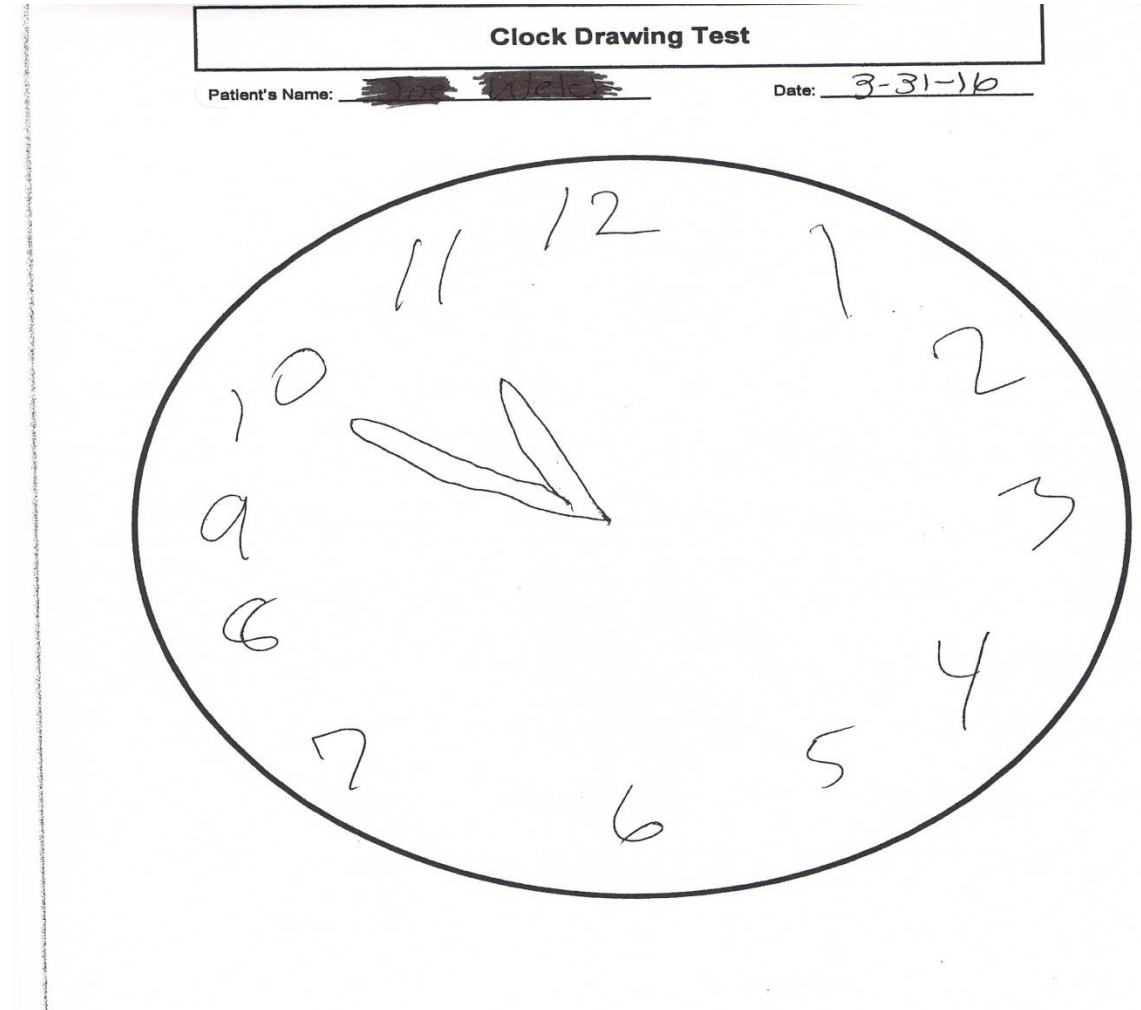
Abnormal Clock
(abnormal hands)



Abnormal Clock
(missing number)



Abnormal or normal clock?

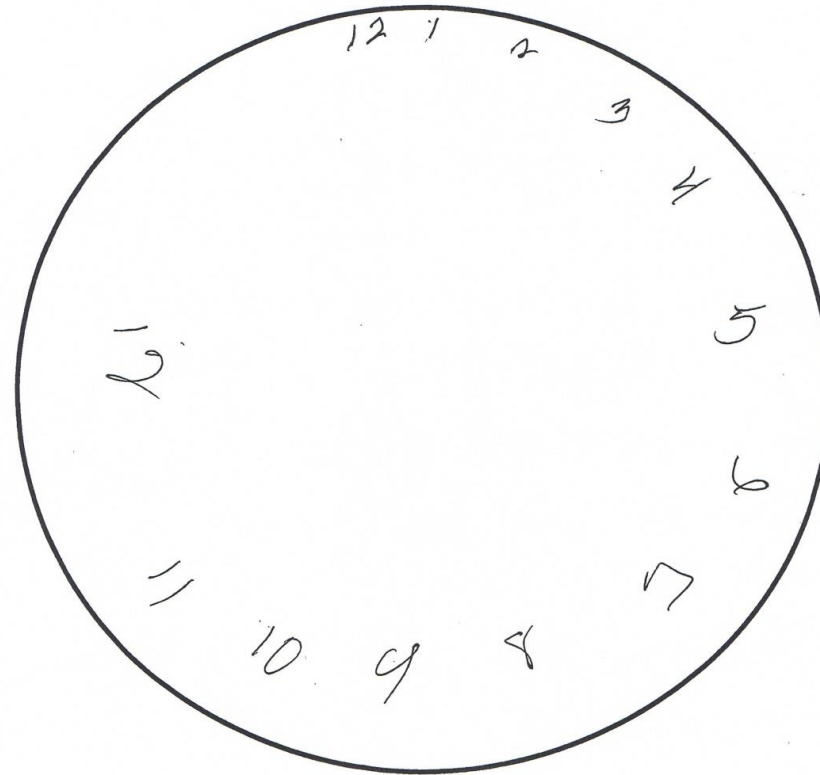


Abnormal or normal clock?



Clock Drawing Test

Patient's Name: [REDACTED] Date: 3-30-16





Talking Points for Navigating a Positive Screening

Now You've Screened Positive (0-3)

Tips for Discussion

- Positive screening is NOT a diagnosis. Don't label them with dementia or Alzheimer's or automatically refer them to organizations specifically for the disease – the Mini-Cog is only a screening tool, and positive findings are not a diagnosis
- Share information in a calm, matter-of-fact, reassuring way in a quiet time/place
- If you find it useful, consider a second screening tool called the AD-8 that you can use with family or significant others
- Extra resource: video on discussing results
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MXzdtLDRDMo>





Talking Points for Navigating a Negative Screening

Reminders:

- If they screen negative, but you or a family/ friend have concerns, you can rescreen later, connect to services, or consider a second tool
- Negative screening does not always mean they don't have cognitive impairment

Now You've Screened Negative

Tips for Discussion

Reminders:

- **Negative screening does not always mean they don't have cognitive impairment**
- If they screen negative but you or a family/ friend have concerns, you can rescreen later, connect to services, or consider a second tool
- The Mini-Cog is only a screening tool, and negative findings are not fool-proof



When to use the Mini-Cog?

Universal screening of all patients is not currently recommended by the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force

It Starts with Detection

Triggers for Screening

(red flags)

10 Warning signs
Worsening of chronic conditions
Poor oral or other hygiene
Poor understanding of medications
Difficulty with adherence to plan
Vagueness in history




Risk Factors

Age
Diabetes
Kidney disease
Heart disease/ HTN
Stroke
Hearing loss
More!



Simple Screen
(Mini-Cog)



You've
Got
This!

- Jump in and try it
- Practice with work colleagues and family
- Don't overthink it
- Don't over "talk" it
- Make it a normal part of your conversations

Additional Resources

- **Mini-Cog website:** www.mini-cog.com
- **Act on Alzheimer's Video Tutorials:** <https://actonalz.org/video-tutorials>
- **Wisconsin Memory Screening in the Community:**
<https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/dementia/memoryscreening.htm>
- **BOLD Public Health Center of Excellence in Early Detection of Dementia:**
<https://bolddementiadetection.org/>
 - **Early Detection of Dementia Toolkit – Health Systems:**
https://bolddementiadetection.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/BOLD_Toolkit_010323.pdf
- **GSA KAER Toolkit:** <https://www.geron.org/publications/kaer-toolkit>



Thank You!

For more about Alzheimer's disease and other dementias, and the IHS Alzheimer's Program

- Visit: <https://www.ihs.gov/alzheimers>
- Join: [IHS Elder Care LISTSERV](#)
- Reach out:
IHSElderHealth@ihs.gov

