Blood Test for Alzheimer's Disease

Memory and thinking changes can have many causes. Your care team may suggest a blood test to find out if Alzheimer's disease is causing these changes. This handout explains how the test works, what the results may mean, and what to think about when you decide if the test is right for you.

Memory and Thinking Changes

Alzheimer's disease is 1 of many causes of memory and thinking changes. These changes may be part of healthy aging, mild cognitive impairment (MCI), or dementia.

Healthy Cognition

It is normal for thinking to change with age. It may take more time to learn new things. You may also get distracted more easily. Memory test results are still in the normal range.

Mild Cognitive Impairment

Mild cognitive impairment (MCI) causes memory or thinking problems that can be found with testing. These problems do not have a large impact on daily life. You can still do tasks such as paying bills or keeping track of visits.

MCI can have many causes:

- Vitamin deficiencies
- Thyroid problems
- Medicine
- Sleep disorders
- Mood disorders
- Alzheimer's disease
- Vascular disease
- Dementia with Lewy bodies

Dementia

Dementia causes more severe memory and thinking problems. These problems affect daily life and may make it hard to live on your own.

Dementia can have many causes:

- Alzheimer's disease
- Vascular disease
- Dementia with Lewy bodies

How the Test Works

If you have mild cognitive impairment (MCI) or dementia, this blood test may help find the cause. Alzheimer's disease causes proteins called amyloid to build up in the brain.

The blood test measures phosphorylated tau (p-tau). The result may show if Alzheimer's disease is causing your memory and thinking problems.

You may want to have the test if:

- You want to know if Alzheimer's disease is linked to your memory and thinking problems
- You want to plan treatment or get a referral to a specialist
- You want to know what to expect so you can plan for the future

You may not want to have the test if:

- You would find knowing the result stressful
- You are concerned about privacy. Your test results will be kept private in your medical record. Anyone with access to your MyChart can see the results. Your results will not be shared with others unless you give them access to your medical record

Next Steps
After you talk with your provider, you can decide whether to have the blood test. You may also decide later and decide with your provider about when to talk about it.

If you do not have this test, your provider can use other tests to look for the cause. These may include memory tests, thinking tests, or brain scans. Your provider may also refer you to a specialist

Insurance Coverage
Insurance will often cover this test. You may still have a copay or deductible. Call your insurance plan before you have the test.

Test Results
If you have the blood test, test results are often sent through MyChart. Tell your provider if you want to get your results by phone or at another visit.

No test is fully correct. This blood test gives the wrong result about 1 out of 20 times.

Possible Test Result	What it Means	Next Steps
To help you decide if this test is right for you, learn what the test can tell us and how we can use the results.		
Positive	Alzheimer's proteins have built up in your brain. They are likely linked to your memory or thinking changes.	• Treatment with medicine • Referral to a specialist • Care for other brain conditions, such as depression
Negative	There is no large buildup of Alzheimer's proteins in your brain. These proteins are not likely linked to your memory or thinking changes.	• Tests for other causes • Checks over time
Intermediate	The protein level is higher than normal but not high enough for a positive result. It is not clear if these proteins are linked to your memory or thinking changes.	• Repeat the blood test in several months • Referral to a specialist for more tests

Your health care team may have given you this information as part of your care. If so, please use it and call if you have any questions. If this information was not given to you as part of your care, please check with your doctor. This is not medical advice. This is not to be used for diagnosis or treatment of any medical condition. Because each person's health needs are different, you should talk with your doctor or others on your health care team when using this information. If you have an emergency, please call 911. Copyright © 9/2026 University of Wisconsin Hospitals and Clinics Authority. All rights reserved. Produced by the Department of Nursing HF#8554.