

# Minimally Conscious State

Minimally [conscious state](#) (MCS) is defined as a condition of severely altered [consciousness](#) in which minimal but definite behavioral evidence of self or environmental awareness is demonstrated.

A minimally conscious state (MCS) is a disorder of [consciousness](#) distinct from [persistent vegetative state](#) and [locked in syndrome](#). Unlike persistent vegetative state, patients with MCS have partial preservation of conscious awareness.

## Epidemiology

MCS is a relatively new category of disorders of consciousness. The natural history and longer term outcome of MCS have not yet been thoroughly studied. The prevalence of MCS was estimated to be 112,000 to 280,000 in adult and pediatric cases.

## Diagnosis

Although MCS patients are able to demonstrate cognitively mediated behavior, they occur inconsistently. They are, however, reproducible or can be sustained long enough to be differentiated from reflexive behavior. Because of this inconsistency, extended assessment may be required to determine if a simple response (e.g. a finger movement or a blink) occurred because of a specific environmental event (e.g. a command to move the finger or to blink) or was merely a coincidental behavior.

Distinguishing between VS and MCS is often difficult because the diagnosis is dependent on observation of behavior that show self or environmental awareness and because those behavioral responses are markedly reduced. One of the more common diagnostic errors involving disorders of consciousness is mistaking MCS for VS which may lead to serious repercussions related to clinical management.

Giacino et al. have suggested demonstration of the following behaviors in order to make the diagnosis of MCS.

Following simple commands.

Gestural or verbal yes/no responses (regardless of accuracy).

Intelligible verbalization.

Purposeful behavior such as those that are contingent due to appropriate environmental stimuli and are not reflexive. Some examples of purposeful behavior include:

appropriate smiling or crying in response to the linguistic or visual content of emotional but not to neutral topics or stimuli.

vocalizations or gestures that occur in direct response to the linguistic content of questions. reaching for objects that demonstrates a clear relationship between object location and direction of reach.

touching or holding objects in a manner that accommodates the size and shape of the object. pursuit eye movement or sustained fixation that occurs in direct response to moving or salient stimuli.

Differential diagnosis

	Coma	Vegetative State	Minimally Conscious State
Eye Opening	No	Yes	Yes
Sleep/Wake Cycles	No	Yes	Yes
Visual Tracking	No	No	Often
Object Recognition	No	No	Inconsistent
Command Following	No	No	Inconsistent
Communication	No	No	Inconsistent
Contingent Emotion	No	No	Inconsistent

Treatment

Minimally Conscious State Treatment.

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