

Dementia

Dementia is an overall term for a particular group of symptoms, characterized by a decline in memory, language, problem-solving and other cognitive skills that affect a person's ability to perform everyday activities. This decline occurs because nerve cells (neurons) in parts of the brain involved in cognitive function have been damaged and no longer function normally. **Alzheimer's** is the most common cause of dementia, accounting for 60% to 80% of cases. **Vascular dementia**, which occurs because of microscopic bleeding and blood vessel blockage in the brain, is the second most common cause of dementia.

Other types and causes of dementia:

- Mixed dementia
- Frontotemporal dementia
- Dementia with Lewy bodies (DLB)
- Parkinson's disease (PD)
- Normal pressure hydrocephalus
- Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease

Individuals with Down syndrome, Huntington's disease and Wernicke-Korsakoff syndrome are at risk for developing dementia symptoms.

With mixed dementia, abnormalities characteristic of more than one type of dementia occur simultaneously in the brain. Physicians may also call this condition "dementia-multifactorial." In the most common form of mixed dementia, the abnormal protein deposits associated with Alzheimer's disease coexist with blood vessel problems linked to vascular dementia. Alzheimer's brain changes also often coexist with Lewy bodies, the abnormal protein deposits characteristic of dementia with Lewy bodies and Parkinson's disease dementia. In some cases, a person may have brain changes linked to Alzheimer's disease, vascular dementia and dementia with Lewy bodies.

Symptoms of dementia can vary greatly. Examples include problems with short-term memory, keeping track of a purse or wallet, paying bills, planning and preparing meals, remembering appointments and getting lost in familiar locations. Mixed dementia symptoms may vary, depending on the types of brain changes involved and the brain regions affected. In many cases, symptoms may be similar to — or even indistinguishable from — those of Alzheimer's or another specific type of dementia. In other cases, a person's symptoms may suggest that more than one type of dementia is present.

In some cases, individuals do not have dementia but instead have a condition with symptoms that mimic those of dementia. Common causes of dementia-like symptoms are depression, delirium, side effects from medications, thyroid problems, certain

vitamin deficiencies and excessive use of alcohol. Unlike dementia, these conditions may often be reversed with treatment.

Research suggests that adopting multiple healthy lifestyle choices, including healthy diet, not smoking, regular exercise and cognitive stimulation, may decrease the risk of cognitive decline and dementia.

A physician can help identify the specific cause of dementia and provide appropriate care.

TS-0052 | Updated November 2021