

DEMENTIA

What is Dementia?

- Dementia is an “umbrella term” that refers to many different diseases.
- Dementia is a syndrome consisting of a number of symptoms, including loss of memory, impaired judgment and reasoning, and changes in mood and behavior.
- These changes may affect a person's ability to function at work, in social relationships or in day-to-day activities.
- Symptoms can be caused by conditions that may be treatable, such as depression, thyroid disease, infections or drug interactions; if the symptoms are not treatable and progress over time, they may be due to damage to the cells in the brain.

The more common forms of dementia are:

Alzheimer's Disease

- a progressive, degenerative disease of the brain, which causes impairment of thinking and memory
- each individual is affected differently and therefore it is difficult to predict the symptoms each person will have, the order in which they will appear or the speed of the disease's progression

CHARACTERISTICS - The following will be affected by the disease:

Cognitive Abilities	Emotions and Moods	Physical Abilities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The ability to understand, think, remember, make decisions and communicate will be affected. • Simple tasks that have been performed for years will become more difficult or be forgotten. • A person will initially experience short term memory loss, and eventually long term memory loss will occur. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A person may appear uninterested and apathetic and may quickly lose interest in the hobbies they previously enjoyed. • The ability to control mood and emotion may be lost. • Some become less expressive and more withdrawn. • A person who has progressed in the disease continues to feel a range of emotions, including joy, anger, fear, love and sadness. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The disease can affect a person's physical coordination and mobility, leading to a gradual physical decline affecting the person's ability to independently perform day-to-day tasks, such as eating, bathing and getting dressed.

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Vascular Dementia (VaD)

- occurs when the cells in the brain are deprived of oxygen, resulting in cell death and leading to the symptoms of dementia
- also called multi-infarct dementia
- a stroke is a common cause of VaD
- usually has a sudden onset

CHARACTERISTICS	OTHER INFORMATION
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Impairment may occur in steps, where functioning can deteriorate, stabilize for a time and then deteriorate again. • The cognitive symptoms may vary, affecting some areas of the brain more or less than others (e.g., language, vision or memory). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Binswanger's disease is a less common form of VaD that is caused by damage to blood vessels deep in the brain's white matter; high blood pressure is a strong risk factor in Binswanger's disease. • When Alzheimer's disease and VaD occur at the same time, the condition is called mixed dementia.

Lewy Body Dementia

- characterized by deposits called "Lewy bodies," which are accumulations of alpha-synuclein proteins that form inside the brain's nerve cells
- mostly affects the areas of the brain involved in thinking and movement
- can occur by itself or together with Alzheimer's disease or Parkinson's
- usually has a rapid progression

CHARACTERISTICS	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The person may experience symptoms similar to both Parkinson's and Alzheimer's disease: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - a progressive loss of memory, language, reasoning and other higher mental functions, such as calculation of figures, is common. - the person may have difficulty with short-term memory, finding the right word and sustaining a train of thought; an individual may also experience depression and anxiety, as well as marked fluctuations in alertness. • Memory difficulties usually develop late in the progression of the disease. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visual hallucinations (seeing things that are not real) are common and can be worse during times of increased confusion: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - hallucinations are often recurrent and typically consist of people, children or animals. - the person may also make errors in perception, such as seeing faces in a carpet pattern. • Some features can resemble Parkinson's. These include rigidity (stiffness of muscles), tremors (shaking), stooped posture and slow, shuffling movements. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - sensitivity to medication, especially some sedatives, may exaggerate these symptoms.

Frontotemporal Dementia

- an umbrella term for a group of disorders that primarily affect the frontal and temporal lobes of the brain – the areas generally associated with personality and behaviour
- in some cases, brain cells in the frontal and temporal lobes shrink or die; in other cases, the cells get larger, containing round, silver "Pick's bodies"

CHARACTERISTICS:

- Since the frontal and temporal areas of the brain can be affected in different ways, early symptoms often affect either **behaviour** and/or **speech**.

Changes in Behaviour	Problems with Speech
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Changes may include becoming either withdrawn or disinhibited (e.g., losing the ability to restrain one's behaviour and actions). • The person may lose interest in personal hygiene, become easily distracted or repeat the same action over and over again. • Overeating or compulsively putting objects in the mouth may occur. • Sometimes incontinence is an early symptom of the disease. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Speech problems can range from reduction of speech to total loss (e.g., becoming mute). • Echoing what has been said by others and stuttering are common symptoms. • The person may have difficulty sustaining a train of thought or maintaining a conversation for any length of time. • Writing and reading are also affected.

- Early on in the disease, behaviour changes or problems with speech can appear separately; as the disease progresses, these two areas will overlap.
- The person often remains oriented to time and has preserved memory in the early stages.
- In the later stages, general symptoms of dementia arise (e.g., confusion and forgetfulness, lost motor skills, swallowing difficulties).

Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease (CJD)

- rare, rapid and fatal form of dementia
- the rate of CJD is approximately one per million people per year worldwide
- caused by infectious agents called prions, which are normally harmless proteins that occur naturally in the brain. However, when they are misshapen, they can cause devastating illness, attacking the brain, killing cells and creating gaps in tissue

CHARACTERISTICS	TYPES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CJD has a long incubation period; it often takes years or even decades after infection before someone with CJD develops signs and symptoms. • Personality changes occur, such as anxiety, depression, memory loss and impaired thinking. • Problems with balance and co-ordination typically occur earlier in vCJD than in classical CJD. • Coma and death results. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Classical CJD (also called sporadic CJD) occurs at random. • Variant CJD (vCJD) is a disease linked to eating beef products from cattle infected with bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE) or "Mad Cow" disease; it attacks the central nervous system and is fatal if illness develops. <p>* Both types of CJD typically cause memory loss and behavioural changes.</p>

References:

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The Alzheimer Society of Manitoba's mission is to alleviate the individual, family and social consequences of Alzheimer's disease and related disorders while supporting the search for a cure.