

## **What is vascular dementia?**

Vascular dementia is a decline in thinking abilities that occurs when blood flow to the brain is reduced and brain cells are deprived of oxygen and nutrients. Vascular dementia is considered the second most common cause of dementia after Alzheimer's dementia, accounting for up to 30 out of 100 (30%) of cases.

## **What are the causes of vascular dementia?**

Any condition that damages the brain's blood vessels can lead to vascular dementia. These "vascular risk factors" include:

- High blood pressure
- Smoking
- Diabetes
- And high cholesterol

Advancing age is also a major risk factor. Follow these steps to reduce the risk of developing vascular dementia:

- Don't smoke
- Keep a healthy blood pressure, cholesterol level, and blood sugar
- Eat a healthy diet
- Exercise
- Maintain a healthy weight
- Limit alcohol consumption

## **What are the symptoms of vascular dementia?**

A person with vascular dementia may experience:

- Trouble paying attention and concentrating
- Reduced ability to organize thoughts
- Taking longer to process information
- Problems with memory

- Depression or trouble controlling emotions
- Physical stroke symptoms such as weakness, speech changes, or trouble walking

### **How is vascular dementia diagnosed?**

Vascular dementia is diagnosed after a thorough evaluation, which includes:

- A discussion of symptoms (including any history of strokes)
- A physical exam
- Diagnostic testing, including a brain scan to look for vascular changes.

Sometimes vascular dementia is difficult to distinguish from Alzheimer's dementia. In many cases, a person may have both vascular dementia and Alzheimer's dementia. This is referred to as a **mixed dementia**.

### **What are the prognosis and options for treatment?**

Unfortunately, there are no treatments that can reverse the damage that has been done to the brain after it has occurred. However, physical therapy can help if there is weakness or trouble walking. Medications and lifestyle changes can reduce the risk of additional vascular injury to the brain. Medications used to treat Alzheimer's dementia may be helpful for mixed dementia.

### **Where can I learn more?**

More information about vascular dementia can be found at:

- The Alzheimer's Association  
[www.alz.org](http://www.alz.org) or by calling (800) 272-3900
- The National Institute on Aging  
[www.nia.nih.gov](http://www.nia.nih.gov) or by calling (800) 438-4380

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