

Vascular dementia

INFORMATION SHEET FROM THE SWEDISH DEMENTIA CENTRE

Vaskulär demenssjukdom • faktablad på engelska

Injuries to the blood vessels

Dementia is the generic term for a number of symptoms that make it difficult to think, plan and communicate. The symptoms are caused by illness or different injuries to the brain. Vascular dementia is caused by injuries or pathological changes in the brain's blood vessels, because of this the illness is sometimes called blood vessel dementia.

Vascular dementia is the next most common cause of dementia and is deemed to account for 25–30 per cent of all cases. At a high age it is not unusual for it to occur at the same time as Alzheimer's, the most common form of dementia.

Stroke is a risk factor

The cause of vascular dementia can vary. It is often the consequence of a stroke, that is, blood clots, bleeding in the brain or arterio sclerosis in the blood vessels. In all cases the brain can suffer a serious lack of oxygen. The injuries that then occur can give symptoms which in various ways can make it difficult coping with everyday living. The symptoms can vary from person to person depending upon the part of the brain that has been affected.

The symptoms vary

Somewhat simplified one can say that judgement, impulse control and concentration deteriorate if the injuries are in the brain's frontal lobe. Injuries in the temporal lobe lead to forgetfulness, difficulty in concentration and learning new things. Injuries in the brain's deeper regions, in the smallest blood vessels, often lead to slower movement and difficulty in planning and doing things/carrying out tasks

It is important to remember that stress often reinforces the symptoms

Progression is often gradual, one stage at a time

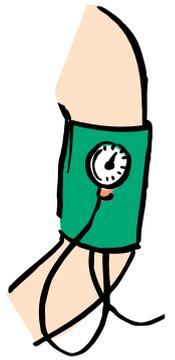
Dementia often develops subversively and slowly. But with vascular dementia the symptoms often come suddenly and the progression of the illness

can be drawn as a down going staircase: conditions get worse, remain stable for a while and then start to deteriorate again.

It is important with an early diagnosis

Vascular dementia cannot be diagnosed with a simple test. The diagnosis is built upon a series of tests, examinations and talks with the patient and relatives.

Dementia analysis usually takes from four to six weeks. It is important that it is started as soon as possible so that the right help and treatment can be given as soon as possible.



Prevent new blood vessel injuries

There are no medicines that can cure vascular dementia. Treatment aims instead to prevent new injuries to the brain. Anticoagulants are given when there is an increased risk for blood clots. In many cases there is a need to regulate blood pressure, sometimes with medication, as high blood pressure increases the risk for stroke.

Even diabetes must be carefully regulated as it can injure the brain's small blood vessels.

Plan for a good life

It is important to be given an explanation of the illness and its symptoms to be able to plan for a good and meaningful life. In addition to preventive treatment can auxiliary resources and a number of other contributions from the community make everyday living easier.

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Additional information sheets in different languages are available on the Swedish Dementia Centre's website:
www.demenscentrum.se/Faktablad



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