Lewy Body Dementia

**Lewy body dementia (LBD)** is a brain disease that impairs thinking and often mobility. It is the third most common cause of dementia after Alzheimer’s disease (AD) and vascular dementia. LBD accounts for about 20% of all dementia cases in the U.S.

**CAUSE**
The cause of LBD is not known. It is rarely inherited. In LBD, the brain contains abnormal protein deposits known as Lewy bodies enriched in the protein alpha-synuclein. Lewy bodies also occur in Parkinson’s disease (PD), but are less widespread in PD. In addition to Lewy bodies throughout the brain, microscopic brain abnormalities found in AD are also present with LBD.

**SYMPTOMS**
A person with LBD may experience:
- cognitive difficulties
- visual hallucinations
- significant day-to-day fluctuations in abilities
- stiffness and slowness of movement
- tremors
- poor balance with falls
- fainting or other periods of unresponsiveness
- acting out dreams

**DIAGNOSIS**
LBD is often confused with AD or PD. Accurate diagnosis is critical because people with LBD have distinct symptoms that require different treatment strategies and may be sensitive to certain medications.

A diagnosis of LBD is made after a thorough evaluation, which includes a discussion of symptoms, a physical examination and diagnostic testing.

Blood tests and brain scans are often performed. The diagnosis may be confirmed after death with a brain autopsy showing Lewy bodies.

**PROGNOSIS and TREATMENT**
LBD worsens over time (years) and impairs the individual’s ability to live and function independently. Though there is no known cure for LBD, three types of medications may be used to treat it.

- Cholinesterase inhibitors such as Aricept, Reminyl, or Exelon;
- Drugs used to treat people with PD (such as Sinemet); and
- Drugs for visual hallucinations and behavioral problems.

*The Rinne Lewy Body Dementia Initiative* is a program of the Michigan Alzheimer's Disease Center at the University of Michigan. This initiative supports those living with Lewy Body Dementia (LBD) and their care partners, improving awareness of LBD among healthcare professionals and the general public and advancing our understanding and treatment of this disease.

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