

Dementia with Lewy Bodies



University of Michigan
Health System

Michigan Alzheimer's Disease Research Center

Dementia with Lewy Bodies (DLB) 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 stroke. DLB accounts for about 20% of all dementia cases in the United States.

CAUSE

The cause of DLB is not known. It is rarely inherited. In DLB, the brain contains abnormal protein deposits known as Lewy bodies. Lewy bodies also occur in Parkinson's disease, but are less widespread. In addition to Lewy bodies, most cases of DLB have some of the microscopic brain abnormalities found in AD.

SYMPTOMS

A person with DLB may experience:

- progressive memory loss and thinking problems;

- visual hallucinations and illusions;
- stiffness and slowness of movement;
- tremors;
- poor balance with falls;
- fainting or other periods of unresponsiveness;
- acting out dreams;
- significant day-to-day fluctuations in abilities.

DIAGNOSIS

DLB is often confused with Alzheimer's disease or Parkinson's disease. Accurate diagnosis is critical because people with DLB have distinct symptoms that require different treatment strategies and may be sensitive to certain medications.

A diagnosis of DLB 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 microscopic Lewy bodies.

PROGNOSIS and TREATMENT

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

1. Cholinesterase inhibitors such as Aricept, Reminyl, or Exelon;
2. Drugs used to treat people with Parkinson's disease (such as Sinemet); and
3. Drugs for visual hallucinations and behavioral problems.

RESOURCES

More information about DLB can be found at:

www.lbda.org

1-800-539-9767