

Lewy Body Dementia

What is 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 up to 20% of all dementia cases in the United States.

What are the causes of Lewy body dementia?

The cause of LBD is not known and it is rarely inherited. In LBD, the brain contains abnormal protein deposits known as Lewy bodies. Lewy bodies also occur in Parkinson's disease (PD), but are less widespread. In addition to Lewy bodies throughout the brain, the microscopic brain abnormalities found in AD are often also present with LBD.

What are the symptoms of Lewy body dementia?

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 and falls
- Fainting or other periods of unresponsiveness
- Acting out dreams

How is Lewy body dementia diagnosed?

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 exam
- Diagnostic testing

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

What are the prognosis and options for treatment?

LBD worsens over time and impairs the individual's ability to live and function independently. Though there is not a known cure for LBD, three types of medications may be used to treat it.

- Cholinesterase inhibitors such as Aricept[®], Razadyne, or Exelon[®]
- Drugs used to treat people with PD such as Sinemet[®]
- Drugs for visual hallucinations and behavioral problems

Where can I learn more?

More information about Lewy Body dementia can be found at:

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

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