Vascular Dementia

Vascular dementia is a common cause of dementia in the elderly. Dementia is a condition that affects the brain and causes people to not think well or act normally. Vascular dementia is one type of dementia. It occurs when blood clots block small blood vessels in the brain and destroy brain tissue. Likely risk factors are high blood pressure and advanced age. This disease can cause stroke, migraine-like headaches, and psychiatric disturbances.

SYMPTOMS

- Confusion.
- Problems with recent memory.
- Wandering or getting lost in familiar places.
- Loss of bladder or bowel control *(incontinence)*.
- Unsteady gait.
- Poor attention and concentration.
- Emotional problems such as laughing or crying inappropriately.
- Difficulty following instructions.
- Problems handling money.
- Depression.
- Difficulty planning ahead.

Usually the damage is slight at first. Over time, as more small vessels are blocked, there is a gradual mental decline. However, symptoms may begin suddenly. Symptoms may be very similar to Alzheimer's disease. The two forms of dementia may occur together. Vascular dementia typically begins between the ages of 60 and 75. It affects men more often than women.

TREATMENT

- Currently there is no treatment for vascular dementia that can reverse the damage that has already occurred.
- Treatment focuses on prevention of additional brain damage and improvement of symptoms.
- It is important to treat the risk factors for vascular dementia, such as keeping blood pressure under control, treating diabetes, lowering cholesterol, and stop smoking.

PROGNOSIS

- Prognosis for patients is generally poor. Individuals with the disease may improve for short periods of time, then get worse again. Early treatment and management of blood pressure and other risk factors may prevent further worsening of the disorder.
- **Research is continually being done to learn more about this problem.**

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