

Vascular dementia

Dementia is a general term for various symptoms that appear when the brain has been weakened by disease. Dementia leads to problems with memory, decision making and communication.

Vascular dementia is caused by changes to the blood vessels in the brain.

Vascular dementia is the second most common form of dementia. Mixed dementia – a mixture of vascular dementia and Alzheimer's disease – is also frequent. Approximately 6.400 elderly patients in Denmark are diagnosed with vascular dementia and possibly a further 3.000 suffer from mixed dementia.

Symptoms and progression

The symptoms depend on which areas of the brain are affected. People with vascular dementia can experience forgetfulness, concentration difficulties, language difficulties or disorientation. Other typical symptoms include weakness or paralysis on one side of the body, emotional changes, sadness, tearfulness or depression.

The progression of vascular dementia can vary widely. In the case of stroke or bleeding in the brain, the symptoms occur suddenly and abruptly. If further strokes or bleeding occur over a longer period, the symptoms develop in a stepwise manner.

Blood clots a major cause

Vascular dementia can have several causes, small strokes in the brain being the most common. Just one single small stroke can lead to dementia.

Other causes of vascular dementia can be bleeding or diseases affecting the blood vessels deep inside the brain. Regular exercise, a healthy diet and avoidance of tobacco significantly lower the risk of cardiovascular disease and vascular dementia. If you have diabetes or high blood pressure, it is important to seek treatment.

Accurate and early diagnosis

If you are worried about vascular dementia, you should consult your doctor. The doctor will not be able to make a diagnosis straight away, but will refer you to various tests and examinations and possibly talk to members of your family. It is important to get an accurate diagnosis to ensure proper treatment and care.

Treatment

Vascular dementia cannot be cured, but you can do much to prevent progression of the symptoms. For example, the doctor can prescribe medication for high blood pressure, a blood thinner or cholesterol-lowering drugs, or, if relevant, treatment for diabetes.

Think of the future

The more you know about the dementia affecting you or someone close to you, the easier it is for you to make decisions for the future concerning issues like moving, writing a will or getting assistance and support.

Sharing experiences with others in the same situation can also be valuable. Every local district (kommune) has dementia counsellors or coordinators who can advise you on the options available for care and support.

Local contact information: