Dementia Causes, Symptoms, Treatment, and Prevention

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The report provides an analysis of dementia, its causes and effects, and how it must be treated. The ways of preventing of the disease have also been described

What is Dementia?

The loss of cognitive functioning is known as dementia. These functions include memorizing or remembering, reasoning, thinking, and abilities related to behaviour to the limit where they impact the everyday life of a person. Other cognitive abilities include language skills, memory, problem-solving, visual perception, paying attention, the ability to focus, and self-management. The inability to control one's emotions and changes in personality can also be seen in individuals with dementia (nia.nih.gov). The severity of the disorder ranges from the mildest phase to the most serious or severe one. In the mildest phase, the cognitive functioning starts being impacted, and in the severe stage, the individual becomes completely dependent on others for even basic daily life activities.

Symptoms of dementia

Major signs and symptoms of dementia include imbalance or difficulties in:

1. Focus
2. Language
3. Reasoning
4. Communication

One of the early signs or indications of dementia is difficulty in memorizing or remembering things. This change involves short-term memory. A person with dementia may know about the events or the happenings that occurred a long time ago, but not what they did a while ago. In short-term memory, people often forget what they were supposed to do, where they left any item, why they came to a particular place, etc. Another major symptom is difficulty in putting thoughts into words or communicating what's going on in the mind. The level of expression decreases, and it takes unusually long to conclude the conversation. Dementia also brings about changes in mood. Changes in mood are difficult to realise in oneself but are noticeable in others; for example, depression is common in

the early stages of dementia. A complete shift or change in personality is also observed. A shy person can become an outgoing individual and vice versa. This is due to the impact of viewing things or judging them. A person starts losing interest in the different activities they used to perform. Thus, an outgoing person may become a total introvert.

When an individual is seen having problems in carrying out daily normal activities, this can imply that he is suffering from the early stage of dementia. The problem starts with handling difficult tasks such as playing hard games, etc., and they also struggle with learning new things or following new routines. Loss of memory and problems in communication lead to confusion. A person with dementia remains confused for a lot of reasons and in different situations. This confused state leads the person to have problems in following the storylines, a failing sense of direction takes over him, keeps on repeating the same behaviours, and struggles to adapt to changing conditions. Physical symptoms include weight loss or weakness in muscles. Changes in appetite and patterns of sleep may also occur.

Causes of dementia

Many diseases have been observed to cause dementia, such as Alzheimer's disease, vascular dementia, mixed dementia, dementia with Lewy bodies, frontotemporal dementia, also known as Pick's disease, Huntington's disease, injury in the brain, Parkinson's disease, infections, and many others. Among all of these diseases, Alzheimer's disease is known as the most common one in causing dementia. Brain cells get surrounded by an abnormal protein, causing damage to the internal structure of the brain. With passing time, the chemical link among the cells weakens, and they start dying. This becomes the cause of memory loss, communication problems, perception or understanding of things, and the ability to make decisions. A neurodegenerative condition related to the abnormal configuration of the brain is known as dementia with Lewy bodies. It includes a protein known as alpha-synuclein. A person suffering from both vascular dementia and Alzheimer's disease is known to have mixed dementia. The movement disorders such as Parkinson's disease and Huntington's disease are also causes of dementia. When an excess amount of cerebrospinal fluid accumulates in the brain, it causes dementia, and this condition is known as normal pressure hydrocephalus. Down syndrome enhances the probability of the occurrence of Alzheimer's disease, which then leads to dementia.

Who gets dementia?

Dementia is mainly caused by individuals over the age of 65. "Scientists are investigating how dementia might run in the family" (alzheimers.org.uk). The disease or the disorder can also be transmitted through genetic influences.

Statistics

Alzheimer's Society estimated that approximately 982,000 people were living with dementia in the United Kingdom in 2024 and projected that the number could rise to about 1.4 million by 2040. These figures include both older and younger people with dementia and should be cited with their reporting year rather than presented as timeless statistics. In the United States, Alzheimer's disease is the most common cause of dementia.

Diagnosis and treatment

Anyone facing issues and problems with their thinking process or memory needs to get themselves a proper assessment. Treatable conditions, like any infection or depression, may be found to be the cause of problems. Thus, proper diagnosis is important for the right treatment. An expert doctor like a psychiatrist, neurologist, or geriatrician helps in the diagnosis of the problem.

All the various causes of dementia cannot be treated and cured. However, the development of different vaccines, drugs, and other medical treatments can help enable the patient to live his life normally. There are some non-drug treatments such as counselling, cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT), cognitive stimulation therapy, etc. All these therapies mostly focus on the psychological condition of the individual. Counseling enables the patient to discuss their feelings about the disease or its causes. CBT is applied when a person is depressed or anxiety, and a person's mind can be made active through cognitive stimulation therapy.

The drug treatment involves galantamine, donepezil, and rivastigmine. These drugs are useful for those suffering from dementia with Lewy bodies and going through delusions, hallucinations, and challenging behaviors such as aggression or agitation. Some drugs are given for the treatment of medical conditions that are the cause of dementia, such as heart problems, diabetes, high blood pressure, and high cholesterol. Drugs control these conditions, and ultimately dementia's progression is slowed down.

Prevention of dementia

Observing closely at the causes and effects of dementia, we can say that an unhealthy lifestyle, in general, is the main problem. Smoking, lack of physical activity, etc., lead to different heart problems and psychological disorders, which then lead to dementia. Overthinking and stress can also be regarded as one of the causes. Maintaining a healthy lifestyle leads to maintenance of weight, which ultimately reduces the chances of dementia occurring. A balanced diet and physical activity reduce the occurrence of conditions such as cancer, stroke, and heart disease. Physical activity also helps in the efficient functioning of the mind. Other ways to keep the mind active and healthy are reading, learning new skills, or doing something creative (alzheimers.org.uk). Keeping oneself relaxed and away from extreme stress prevents harmful and unhealthy effects. A person suffering from any of the

causes of dementia must go to a specialist, whether it be a physical or a psychological cause; diagnosis and treatment are very important for the prevention of the disease.

References

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