

PARKINSON'S AND DEMENTIA

Parkinson's disease (PD) dementia is a condition that some people can experience after living with PD for some time. It is often difficult to accurately diagnose the precise form of dementia a person may have, and differentiate PD dementia from Lewy body dementia and Alzheimer's disease.

*Talking about dementia can be frightening. It is very important to remember that **not everyone with PD will experience cognitive changes**. While over half of people diagnosed with PD do experience a degree of cognitive decline, not all among these go on to develop dementia. **As will all symptoms of PD, everyone is different.***

Cognitive Decline and Dementia

Cognitive decline includes difficulties with attention, task completion, decision-making, problem solving, memory, and word-finding. These symptoms can be very frustrating and annoying, but may not have a serious impact on one's daily life in the early stages.

Dementia is described as a serious decline in the cognitive challenges listed above, to the point where they have a significant impact on functioning and daily life. Dementia also represents a dramatic change for carepartners and families to cope with.

Parkinson's dementia can potentially have a greater impact on social and occupational functioning compared with Alzheimer's disease due to the combination of motor and cognitive impairments. Development of dementia in Parkinson's represents progression of the disease, usually after quite a number of years of motor impairment.

Symptoms of PD dementia include:

- forgetfulness
- slow thought process
- difficulty concentrating, and fluctuating attention
- difficulty with word-finding
- difficulty with decisions, planning, and problem-solving
- sleep disturbances
- hallucinations
- depression

Lewy Body Dementia

The diagnosis of Lewy body dementia is made when symptoms appear before or at the same time as the onset of motor symptoms of PD. The symptoms specific to Lewy body dementia can include all of those common in PD dementia, as well as memory problems, slowness of movement, and other PD symptoms.

Alzheimer's Disease

Alzheimer's is a form of dementia relating to the development in the brain of substances known as "plaques", which are toxic to neurons, and "tangles", which interfere with vital processes, eventually choking off the living cells.

The symptoms of Alzheimer's include:

- memory loss that disrupts daily life
- difficulty planning and finishing tasks
- confusion, disorientation
- apathy and depression
- behavioural changes
- difficulty speaking

Treatments for Dementia

At the present time, there is no medication approved specifically for PD dementia or Lewy body dementia, though certain medications used in the treatment of Alzheimer's have proven helpful for some people. Medications that may be considered by your physician include Cholinesterase inhibitors and antidepressants.

It is important to bring an accurate list of symptoms of cognitive decline and/or dementia with you to your neurologist, and, if possible, a carepartner, friend, or family member should be present with you during your appointments.

Additional Resources

Comprehensive Care Plan Checklist | PSBC Helpsheet | bit.ly/pdsymptomchecklist

Parkinson's Dementia | Parkinson Foundation | bit.ly/2DmAMY3

Lewy Body Dementia Association | www.lbda.org

Alzheimer Society British Columbia | www.alzheimerbc.org