



## Prevention

- Train your brain to stay sharp, e.g. by reading books and magazines, doing crossword puzzles, sudoku and learning new things that are different from your daily routine;
- Exercise regularly;
- Maintain a healthy and balanced diet;
- Quit smoking;
- Consume alcohol in moderation;
- Prevent brain injury: minimise risks of head injury due to accidents and maintain neurovascular health by good control of blood pressure, blood glucose and cholesterol. Regular physical checkups are also recommended.



HKSH Neurology Centre

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### Happy Valley

Hong Kong Sanatorium & Hospital  
10/F, Li Shu Pui Block  
2 Village Road, Happy Valley, Hong Kong  
Tel: (852) 2835 7689  
Fax: (852) 2892 7569  
neurology@hksh-hospital.com  
www.hksh-hospital.com  
Consultation by Appointment

### Admiralty

HKSH Healthcare Medical Centre  
Level 22, One Pacific Place  
88 Queensway, Hong Kong  
Tel: (852) 2855 6688  
Fax: (852) 2892 7431  
neurology@hksh-healthcare.com  
www.hksh-healthcare.com  
Consultation by Appointment



For enquiries and appointments,  
please contact us



# Dementia



## What is Dementia?

Dementia (or senile dementia) describes a group of neurocognitive symptoms and impairment that are caused by neurological disorders or other diseases damaging the nerves cells in the brain.

The decline in cognitive functions is worse than what one may expect during the normal aging process, and the daily lives of patients will be interfered by the impact on such areas as memory, language, orientation, reasoning, planning, temperament and emotion.

## Causes

### 1. Alzheimer's Disease (AD)

AD develops as a result of loss of neurons and synapses in brain due to degeneration. With special medical imaging (PET Scan), deposits of protein fragment beta-amyloid (plaques) and twisted strands of protein tau (tangles) may be seen.

### 2. Vascular Dementia (VD)

Also known as multi-infarct dementia, VD occurs when brain cells die of lack of oxygen caused by the narrowing or blockage of blood vessels.

### 3. Parkinson's Disease Dementia

Some patients may develop cognitive impairment as Parkinson's disease progresses.

### 4. Dementia with Lewy Bodies (DLB, also known as Diffuse Lewy Body Disease)

A rare type of degenerative brain disease that presents with mental symptoms and motor symptoms in the early course of the disease, characterised by the diffuse deposits of Lewy Bodies in the brain.

### 5. Other Diseases

HIV/AIDS, syphilis, hypothyroidism, normal pressure hydrocephalus, deficiency in Vitamin B12 or folic acid

## Symptoms

- Loss of ability to plan and organise daily activities
- Impairment of recent memory
- Disorientation of time and space
- Impaired language, calculation and judgment
- Personality changes, i.e. agitation
- Depression and anxiety
- Paranoia

## Diagnosis

### 1. Clinical Assessment

Doctor will review your medical history and symptoms, followed by a physical examination with neurological evaluation to help identify any functional impairment or cognitive issue. You might be referred to a clinical psychologist for comprehensive assessment if needed.

Moreover, patients with depression will show slower responses resembling symptoms of dementia. The mood of patients is also assessed.

### 2. Laboratory Test

To detect any reversible cause that can affect brain functions, such as low thyroid hormone level, vitamin B-12 deficiency or certain infectious diseases.

### 3. Brain Imaging

To rule out structural brain lesion, e.g. tumour or hydrocephalus.

### 4. PET Scan with Special Radiotracers

Specific image scanning for Alzheimer's disease diagnosis may be useful in selected patients.

## Treatment and Care

- To treat the reversible cause of dementia (if present), e.g. vitamin B12 replacement if dementia is caused by vitamin B12 deficiency; or if vascular disease is a contributing factor, to achieve optimal control of all vascular risk factors with appropriate antithrombotic drugs.
- Medications
  - For symptom alleviation: Acetylcholinesterase inhibitor, i.e. Aricept (Donepezil), Exelon (Rivastigmine), Reminyl (Galantamine)
  - Ebixa (Memantine) is a NMDA receptor antagonist which regulates the activity of another chemical messenger called glutamate, which leads to brain cell damage.
- Therapists will train patients in mobility, physical performance, gait balance, self-care, swallowing and speech functions.
- To encourage patients to use notebooks and notepads as memory aids.

