

Subacute cerebellar degeneration (SCD) is characterized by the deterioration of the area of the brain concerned with muscle coordination and balance (the cerebellum). Less frequently, the area involved may include the area connecting the spinal cord to the brain (the medulla oblongata, the cerebral cortex, and the brain stem). There are two types of subacute cerebellar degeneration: paraneoplastic cerebellar degeneration, which sometimes precedes the diagnosis of cancer, and alcoholic or nutritional cerebellar degeneration, caused by a lack of the vitamin B-1 (thiamine). These two types share symptoms but not the same cause. In paraneoplastic cerebellar degeneration, the average age of onset is 50, with males affected more often than females. This form of cerebellar degeneration may precede cancer. Alcoholic or nutritional cerebellar degeneration affects alcoholics and people with thiamine deficiency. It is not related to cancer and is more common than the paraneoplastic type. Paraneoplastic cerebellar degeneration may improve after successful treatment of the underlying cancer. For alcoholic/nutritional cerebellar degeneration, thiamine is given along with other B vitamins, usually relieving the condition if the patient stops drinking alcohol and resumes a normal diet.