

Overview

Dementia with Lewy bodies

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Dementia with Lewy bodies (DLB) is one of the most common types of dementia. It is also called Lewy body dementia.

It develops slowly and gets worse over several years.

Lewy bodies are abnormal clumps of protein that form in nerve cells in the brain.

Symptoms of dementia with Lewy bodies

If you have dementia with Lewy bodies you may have:

- hallucinations - you see, hear or smell things that are not there
- problems with understanding, thinking, memory and judgement - but your memory may be less affected than with other types of dementia
- confusion or sleepiness - this can change over minutes or hours
- slow movement, stiff limbs and tremors (uncontrollable shaking)
- disturbed sleep, often with violent movements and shouting out
- fainting spells, unsteadiness and falls

These problems can make daily activities difficult. As time goes on it can become hard to look after yourself.

[Symptoms of dementia with Lewy bodies](#)

Contact your GP if:

- you think you have symptoms of dementia - especially if you're age 65 or older

Your GP can do some checks to try to find the cause of your symptoms. They will refer you to a memory clinic or another specialist for further tests if needed.

If you're worried someone else may have dementia, encourage them to contact their GP. You could suggest that you go with them.

Causes of dementia with Lewy bodies

Dementia with Lewy bodies is caused by small clumps of protein (Lewy bodies) forming in brain cells.

They build up in parts of your brain that affect thinking, visual perception and muscle movement.

It's not clear why the clumps develop and how exactly they damage the brain. It may be that the proteins interfere with signals sent between brain cells.

It is rare for dementia with Lewy bodies to run in families.

Tests for dementia with Lewy bodies

There is no single test for dementia with Lewy bodies.

But you will probably have:

- an assessment of your symptoms
- an assessment of your mental abilities - this usually involves tasks and questions
- blood tests to rule out other conditions with similar symptoms
- brain scans to detect signs of dementia or other problems with the brain

Treatments for dementia with Lewy bodies

There is no cure for dementia with Lewy bodies or any treatment to slow it down.

But there are treatments to help control some of the symptoms, including:

- medicines to reduce hallucinations, confusion, drowsiness, movement problems and disturbed sleep
- therapies such as physiotherapy, occupational therapy and speech and language therapy
- psychological therapies designed to improve memory, problem-solving skills and language

[Treatment for dementia with Lewy bodies](#)

Outlook for dementia with Lewy bodies

How fast dementia with Lewy bodies gets worse varies from person to person.

Most people need home-based help. Some need care in a nursing home.

The average survival time after diagnosis is 6 to 12 years. Some people live much longer than this.

Support

If you or a loved one has been diagnosed with dementia, remember that you're not alone.

You can get advice and support from:

- [Dementia Understand Together](#)
- [Alzheimer Society of Ireland](#)

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