

## **What is Lewy body dementia?**

Lewy body dementia (LBD) is a brain disease that impairs thinking and often mobility. It is the third most common cause of dementia after Alzheimer's dementia (AD) and vascular dementia. LBD accounts for up to 20 out of 100 (20%) of all dementia cases in the United States.

## **What is the cause of Lewy body dementia?**

The cause of LBD is not known and it is rarely inherited. In LBD, the brain contains abnormal protein deposits known as Lewy bodies. Lewy bodies also occur in Parkinson's disease (PD), but are less widespread. In addition to Lewy bodies throughout the brain, the microscopic brain abnormalities found in Alzheimer's Dementia (AD) are often also present with LBD.

## **What are the symptoms of Lewy body dementia?**

A person with LBD may experience:

- Thinking difficulties, including trouble with reasoning and attention
- Visual hallucinations ("seeing" people or things that are not there)
- Significant day-to-day fluctuations in abilities
- Stiffness and slowness of movement
- Tremors
- Poor balance and falls
- Fainting or other periods of unresponsiveness
- Acting out dreams

## **How is Lewy body dementia diagnosed?**

LBD is often confused with Alzheimer's Dementia (AD) or Parkinson's Disease (PD). Accurate diagnosis is critical because people with LBD have distinct symptoms that require different treatment strategies and may be sensitive to certain medications.

A diagnosis of LBD is made after a thorough evaluation, which includes:

- A discussion of symptoms
- A physical exam
- Diagnostic testing

Blood tests and brain scans are often performed. The diagnosis may be confirmed after death with a brain autopsy showing Lewy bodies.

## **What are the prognosis and options for treatment?**

LBD worsens over time and impairs the individual's ability to live and function independently. Though there is no known cure for LBD, three types of medications may be used to treat it.

- Cholinesterase inhibitors such as donepezil (Aricept®), galantamine (Razadyne), or rivastigmine (Exelon®)
- Drugs used to treat people with Parkinson's Disease (PD) such as carbidopa/levodopa (Sinemet®)
- Drugs for visual hallucinations and behavioral problems

## **Where can I learn more?**

More information about Lewy body dementia can be found at:

- The U-M Rinne Lewy Body Dementia Initiative  
<https://alzheimers.med.umich.edu/lbd/> or by calling (734) 764-5137
- The Lewy Body Dementia Association  
[www.lbda.org](http://www.lbda.org) or by calling (404) 935-6444
- The National Institute on Aging  
[www.nia.nih.gov](http://www.nia.nih.gov) or by calling (800) 438-4380

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