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Neurocognitive disorder

Neurocognitive disorder is a general term that describes decreased mental function due to a medical disease other than a psychiatric illness. It is often used synonymously (but incorrectly) with dementia.

Causes

Listed below are conditions associated with neurocognitive disorder.

BRAIN INJURY CAUSED BY TRAUMA

- Bleeding into the brain (intracerebral hemorrhage)
- Bleeding into the space around the brain (subarachnoid hemorrhage)
- Blood clot inside the skull causing pressure on brain (subdural hematoma)
- Concussion

BREATHING CONDITIONS

- Low oxygen in the body (hypoxia)
- High carbon dioxide level in the body (hypercapnia)

CARDIOVASCULAR DISORDERS

- Dementia due to many strokes (multi-infarct dementia)
- Heart infections (endocarditis, myocarditis)
- Stroke
- Transient ischemic attack (TIA)

DEGENERATIVE DISORDERS

- Alzheimer disease (also called senile dementia, Alzheimer type)
- Creutzfeldt-Jacob disease
- Diffuse Lewy Body disease

- Huntington disease
- Multiple sclerosis
- Normal pressure hydrocephalus
- Parkinson disease
- Pick disease

DEMENTIA DUE TO METABOLIC CAUSES

- Kidney disease
- Liver disease
- Thyroid disease (hyperthyroidism or hypothyroidism)
- Vitamin deficiency (B1, B12, or folate)

DRUG AND ALCOHOL-RELATED CONDITIONS

- Alcohol withdrawal state
- Intoxication from drug or alcohol use
- Wernicke-Korsakoff syndrome (a long-term effect of excessive alcohol consumption or malnutrition)
- Withdrawal from drugs (especially sedative-hypnotics and corticosteroids)

INFECTIONS

- Any sudden onset (acute) or long-term (chronic) infection
- Blood poisoning (septicemia)
- Brain infection (encephalitis)
- Meningitis (infection of the lining of the brain and spinal cord)
- Prion infections, such as mad cow disease
- Late-stage syphilis

Complications of cancer can also lead to neurocognitive disorder.

Other conditions that may mimic organic brain syndrome include:

- Depression
- Neurosis
- Psychosis

Symptoms

Symptoms can differ based on the disease. In general, organic brain syndromes cause:

- Agitation
- Confusion
- Long-term loss of brain function (dementia)
- Severe, short-term loss of brain function (delirium)

Exams and Tests

Tests depend on the disorder, but may include:

- Blood tests
- Electroencephalogram (EEG)
- Head CT scan
- Head MRI
- Lumbar puncture (spinal tap)

Treatment

Treatment depends on the underlying condition. Many conditions are treated mainly with rehabilitation and supportive care to help the person with activities lost due to areas where brain function is affected.

Medicines may be needed to reduce aggressive behaviors that can occur with some of the conditions.

Outlook (Prognosis)

Some disorders are short-term and treatable. But many are long-term or get worse over time.

Possible Complications

People with neurocognitive disorder often lose the ability to interact with others or function on their own.

When to Contact a Medical Professional

Call your health care provider if:

- You have been diagnosed with organic brain syndrome and you are uncertain about the exact disorder.
- You have symptoms of this condition.
- You have been diagnosed with neurocognitive disorder and your symptoms become worse.

Alternative Names

Organic mental disorder (OMS); Organic brain syndrome

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