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Vascular Cognitive Impairment

FACTSHEET

TUH Memory Assessment and Support Service

Vascular Cognitive Impairment (VCI) is a decline in thinking abilities caused by diseases that damages the brains blood vessels.



How does it develop?

The heart and the brain are connected by the vascular system that delivers blood, oxygen and nutrients to the brain and around the body. For a person to be healthy and function properly, the brain cells need the vascular supply to work efficiently. If the vascular supply within the brain becomes damaged and blood cannot reach the brain cells, the cells will eventually die. This is what happens in a stroke, and VCI is often associated with a recent (within 6 months) stroke.

What causes damage to the vascular system in the brain?

There are a number of conditions that can cause or increase damage to the vascular system. These include high blood pressure, heart problems, high cholesterol and diabetes. Having one health condition can put you at a higher risk of developing other health conditions. This is why it is important that you know what health conditions you have and that they are treated at the earliest opportunity.

What are the symptoms of VCI?

Symptoms of VCI can begin suddenly and worsen or improve over time.

Problems concentrating and communicating; depression; thinking difficulties, a 'stepped' progression (with symptoms remaining at a constant level and then suddenly deteriorating); periods of acute confusion.

What is the difference between vascular cognitive impairment (VCI) and vascular dementia?

Persons with VCI may have difficulty in planning, reasoning and thinking skills but will still be independently doing their daily activities. Vascular dementia is diagnosed as having cognitive impairment and being unable to carry out some normal daily functions.

How is VCI treated?

Managing health conditions and risk factors that affect the health of your heart and blood vessels can sometimes slow the rate at which VCI progresses. Medications to control high blood pressure, high cholesterol, atrial fibrillation, heart disease and diabetes can be prescribed. Sometimes other drugs are prescribed to prevent clots from forming in blood vessels.

Eating a healthy diet, Doing regular exercise (at least 30 minutes of moderate exercise a few days a week) and not smoking can decrease the risk of further strokes or vascular brain damage.



Maintain a healthy weight. Obesity contributes more to other risk factors such as high blood pressure, diabetes and heart disease. Weight loss can help lower your blood pressure and improve your cholesterol levels.

Drink alcohol in moderation, if at all and manage your stress levels.