

Common Dementias Explained

Overview

Dementia can be caused by a number of different conditions; it is a symptom of neurodegenerative diseases like Alzheimer's, frontotemporal dementia or corticobasal degeneration. The term "dementia" describes a progressive, degenerative decline in cognitive function that gradually impairs memory and the ability to learn, reason, make judgments, communicate and carry out daily activities. While it often includes memory loss, memory loss by itself does not mean that a person has dementia. Dementia affects more than 50 million people worldwide.

Alzheimer's Disease (AD)

Alzheimer's disease is a progressive, degenerative brain disease that slowly erodes memory and thinking skills, and eventually even the ability to carry out simple tasks. It is the most common cause of dementia. Alzheimer's may occur in combination with vascular dementia, or other dementias.

Frontotemporal Dementia (FTD)

Frontotemporal dementia is a group of related conditions resulting from the progressive degeneration of the temporal and frontal lobes of the brain. These areas of the brain play a significant role in decision-making, behavioral control, emotion and language. Common forms of FTD:

Primary Progressive Aphasia (PPA)

Is caused by degeneration in the areas of the brain that control speech and language. This type of aphasia begins gradually, with speech or language symptoms that will vary depending on the brain areas affected by the disease.

Progressive Supranuclear Palsy (PSP)

A degenerative disease of the brain leading to difficulties with walking and balance, problems with eye movements, changes in behavior, difficulty with speech and swallowing, and dementia.

Corticobasal Degeneration

A progressive neurological disorder that affects nerve cells that control walking, balance, mobility, vision, speech and swallowing.

Behavioral Variant FTD (bvFTD)

Involves changes in personality, behavior, judgment. Behavior and poor judgment go unnoticed by the individual. Inappropriate and impulsive behaviors are common along with apathy and loss of initiative. Memory generally not affected.

Lewy Body Dementias

Lewy body dementias include dementia with Lewy bodies (DLB) and Parkinson's disease with dementia (PDD) and are the second most frequent cause of dementia in elderly adults. Common symptoms include problems with movement, visual hallucinations, and fluctuations in thinking skills or attention.

Mild Cognitive Impairment

In contrast to Alzheimer's where other cognitive skills are affected, mild cognitive impairment (MCI) is defined by deficits in memory that do not significantly impact daily functioning. Memory problems may be minimal to mild and hardly noticeable to the individual.

Vascular Dementia

Vascular dementia is a subtly progressive worsening of memory and other cognitive functions due to chronic, reduced blood flow in the brain, eventually resulting in dementia. Clinically, patients with vascular dementia may look very similar to patients with Alzheimer's, and the two diseases are very difficult to distinguish from each other. Vascular dementia may occur in with Alzheimer's disease.

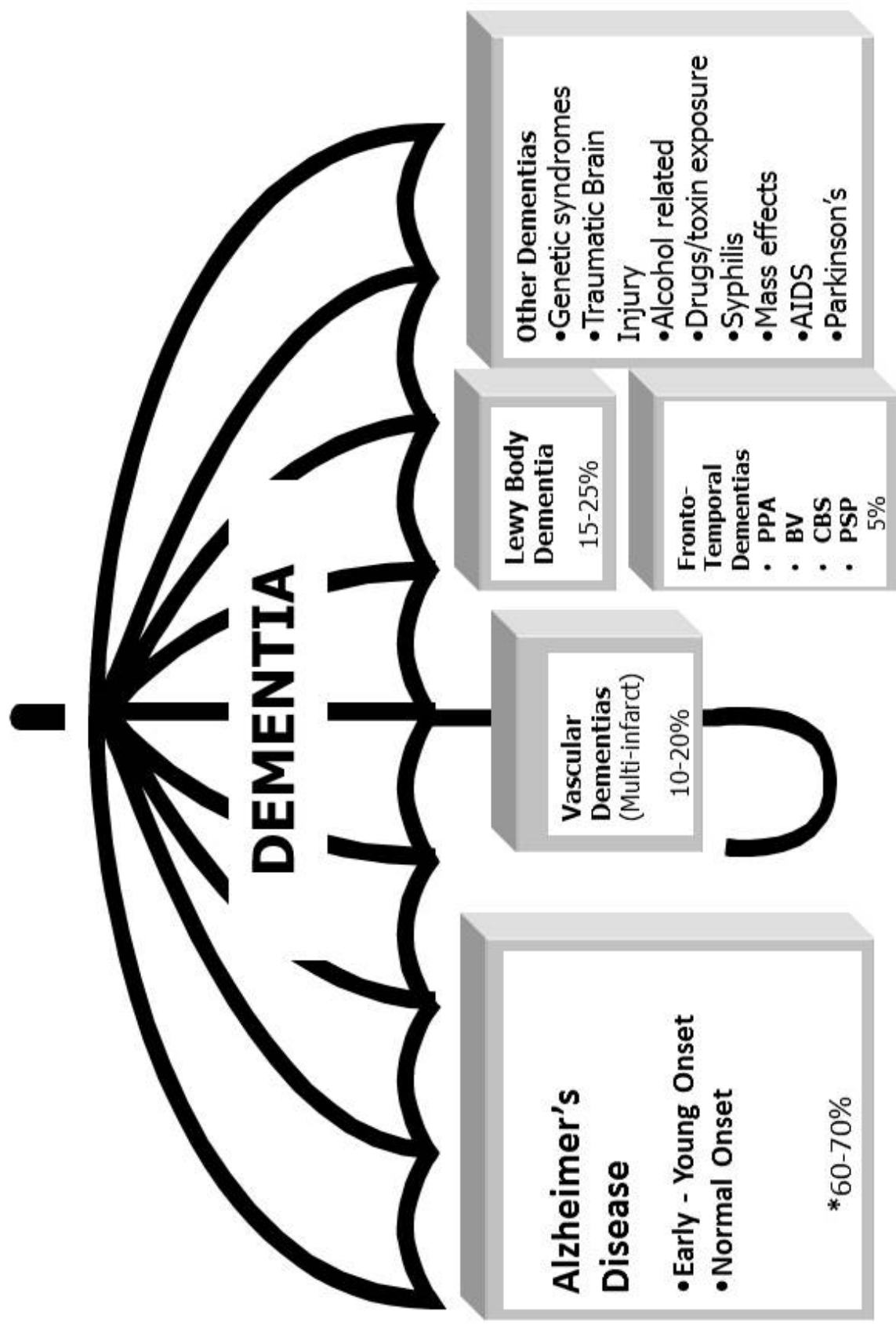
<http://memory.ucsf.edu/education/diseases>



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*Percentages from D. Kaufer, MD, UNC-CH, Carolina Alzheimers Network, Aug. 2010