

## What's Vascular Dementia? A Growing Health Concern

(NAPSA)—Have you recently had a stroke? Do you often have problems with your memory, such as trouble making a decision or following a conversation? If you answered “yes” to both questions, you may be experiencing a condition called vascular dementia (VaD). Dementia is memory loss that affects the ability to perform everyday tasks.

VaD affects approximately 1.3 million Americans. It is the second leading cause of dementia after Alzheimer's disease (AD) and accounts for up to 20 percent of the dementia cases in the United States, making the condition a significant and growing health care concern.

VaD is caused by a single, localized stroke or series of strokes. A stroke can cause damage to the

If you or a loved one experience any of the symptoms listed below, you should talk to your doctor.

### VaD Risk Factors

- Prior history of stroke(s)
- Diabetes
- High blood pressure
- Smoking
- Obesity
- High cholesterol
- Heart disease
- Age

### Symptoms of VaD

- Memory loss
- Confusion
- Difficulty paying attention/following conversation
- Impaired motor skills
- Difficulty planning and organizing tasks
- Visual orientation problems
- Difficulty with calculations, making decisions
- Impaired executive function (such as problem solving, judgment)
- Behavior changes, such as mood swings, irritability, decreased motivation and depression




To help understand the differences between AD and VaD, here are a few important facts:

### AD

- Patients typically experience a gradual onset and will have a gradual, progressive decline.
- Patients experience memory loss, such as misplacing items, getting lost in familiar places or trouble following conversations.

### VaD

- Patients will typically experience abrupt onset of dementia—usually within three months of having a stroke—followed by a stepwise cognitive decline, if other strokes occur.
- Patients experience impairment in executive function, such as making decisions or judgments or solving problems. Memory can also be affected in VaD. 

brain tissue. In VaD patients, the damaged brain cells can not process information. Depending on location, this can lead to confusion, memory loss and problems with activities of daily living (using the phone, handling money and doing household chores).

“Many VaD patients are undiagnosed,” said Dr. Stephen Salloway, Director of Neurology and The Memory Disorders Program, Associate Professor of Clinical Neurosciences at Brown Medical School, Providence, Rhode Island. “Patients who have had a stroke have complex medical problems, and physicians often focus on treating the underlying conditions rather than memory loss or behavioral symptoms of VaD. Increased awareness of VaD signs, symptoms and risk factors will hopefully result in better medical care for VaD patients.”

Currently, no medications are approved to treat VaD. Existing treatment strategies focus on preventing stroke or reducing the risk of additional strokes. Those at risk of stroke can take appropriate steps to control the associated conditions to help prevent VaD from developing, such as reducing high blood pressure or cholesterol, controlling diabetes or losing weight. However, new developments in VaD therapy may be on the horizon. Medications are being studied for the treatment of VaD. Research has shown that patients with VaD may benefit from treatment with these medications.

For more information about how to identify if you are at risk for VaD, contact the National Stroke Association at 1-800-STROKES or visit [www.stroke.org](http://www.stroke.org).