

Treatable Dementias



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Dementia, a syndrome of acquired intellectual deterioration, can be permanent or reversible depending on causes of cognitive impairment. The prevalence of reversible dementia is around 15% in most series. When evaluating demented patients, a careful and detailed history as well as meticulous physical and neurologic examinations will help determine the treatable causes of dementia. A list of treatable causes of dementia is long but can be summarized under the category of VITAMINS, an acronym often used for identifying rapidly progressive dementias: V (Vascular or hemorrhage): SDH; I (Infection): encephalitis (bacterial, viral, fungal, rickettsial), HIV dementia, cysticercosis, Whipple's disease, progressive multifocal leukoencephalopathy, neurosyphilis; T (toxic-metabolic): heavy metals (mercury, arsenic, lead, thallium), alcohol, vitamin deficiencies (B1, B12, niacin), electrolyte abnormality, endocrine dysfunction (hypothyroidism, Cushing syndrome), uremic encephalopathy, hepatic encephalopathy; A (Autoimmune): CNS vasculitis/cerebritis (eg, lupus), Hashimoto encephalopathy, sarcoidosis, Behcet's syndrome; M (Metastasis and tumor): brain tumor (e.g., meningioma); I (Iatrogenic): medications such as amitriptyline and long acting benzodiazepine (e.g., diazepam); N (Neurodegenerative and hydrocephalus): NPH; S (Systemic): delirium and depression, pulmonary insufficiency, cardiac arrhythmia, severe anemia. A thorough laboratory evaluation including complete blood count, erythrocyte sedimentation rate, electrolytes, blood urea nitrogen and blood sugar, liver and thyroid function tests, serum calcium and phosphorus levels, B12 and folate levels, serum copper and ceruloplasmin, urinalysis, syphilis serology, human immunodeficiency virus serology, heavy metal serum levels, protein electrophoresis, chest X-ray, electrocardiogram, lumbar puncture, CT/MRI may demonstrate treatable disorders. Positron emission tomography (PET) and single photon emission computed tomography (SPECT) are not recommended as routine studies. Brain biopsy is indicated in few cases.

Key Words: Dementia; Treatable; Reversible

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