

## ■ Multi-infarct dementia

This form of dementia accounts for 20 per cent of all dementias and is the result of death of brain tissue (infarction) after a series of very small strokes or 'strokelets'. Brain cells in a small area of the brain are killed, either because the blood supply to that area is blocked (thrombo-embolic infarction), or because the blood vessels burst (haemorrhagic infarction), releasing blood into that area of the brain. Each stroke may be so small that the sufferer doesn't actually notice.

Persistent high blood pressure is one factor which has been identified as causing damage to the walls of small blood vessels in the brain. Typically the illness progresses in a stepwise fashion in which mental function deteriorates and then stabilises. Special features of multi-infarct dementia include a greater degree of awareness and insight.

## ■ Pick's disease

Pick's disease is a rare degenerative disease which particularly affects the front of the person's brain, leading to loss of judgement and disinhibition. It is most common in women and usually begins between the ages of 50 and 60 years. Early symptoms tend to be changes in behaviour and personality. So far the cause for the disease is unknown and no specific treatment exists.

## ■ Huntington's disease (Huntington's Chorea)

This disease affects approximately 3,000 people in the United Kingdom at any one time. It is an inherited degenerative disease, due to a dominant gene, which means that one half of all offspring can be expected to develop the disease. Huntington's Chorea specifically affects the motor control system, and so early symptoms include twitching of limbs or muscles in the face. There is no specific cure but certain drugs can reduce irregular movement to some degree.

## ■ Parkinson's disease

Parkinson's disease is due to a loss of nerve cells and the neurotransmitter dopamine, which they contain. Characteristic symptoms, which often arise gradually, are tremor, stillness of limbs, and slowness of movement, speech and thought. Drug treatments which modify dopamine levels can cause improvement in the movement disorder.

## ■ HIV/AIDS dementia

Dementia is common in the later stages of the HIV/AIDS illness, although subtle mild symptoms such as impaired attention and impaired fine motor speed may be observed early on.

## ■ Cruetzfeldt-Jacob disease

This is a very rare dementing illness that runs a very rapid course. On average there are 30 new cases a year in the UK. Most patients die within 2 years. Florid psychiatric symptoms such as delusions and hallucinations are often seen. The illness is transmissible, but the precise agent of transmission remains unknown.

## ■ Lewy Body disease

Lewy Body disease is characterised by fluctuating impairment in memory and cognitive skills, and visual and auditory hallucination. It is often mistaken for schizophrenia.

## ■ Semantic dementia

This is a form of dementia that starts off with very pronounced language impairment. The sufferer often cannot find the right words to identify things and their ability to comprehend language is impaired. Often there is evidence of an acquired dyslexia in reading and spelling skills. Memory, perceptual skills and non-verbal problem solving are initially well preserved.