

Worksheet 14:

Fronto-temporal disease

Cause

Not known. Fronto-temporal disease is the fourth most common cause of dementia, representing approximately 2% of people with dementia in the UK. It typically affects people in their 40s and 50s. The word fronto-temporal refers to the two parts or lobes of the brain that are damaged in this form of dementia. The frontal lobes of the brain control behaviour and emotions. They also control language. The temporal lobes have many roles including learning, memory and understanding of words.

How it affects the brain

Fronto-temporal disease is caused when brain cells in the frontal and/or temporal lobes of the brain die and the pathways that connect them change. There is also some loss of important chemical messengers. Over time, the brain tissue in the frontal and temporal lobes shrinks.

Risk factors

Experts assume that the disease reflects a mixture of genetic, medical and lifestyle factors. Unlike Alzheimer's disease or Vascular disease, it doesn't seem that Fronto-temporal disease becomes much more common in older age. Fronto-temporal disease runs in families much more often than in the more common forms of dementia. About 10–15 per cent of people with Fronto-temporal disease have a strong family history of it, with several close relatives in different generations affected.

Likely signs and symptoms

Fronto-temporal disease affects each person in very different ways but some of the signs and symptoms may include:

- A loss of ability to empathise with others or see other points of view; becoming extrovert when they were previously introvert, or withdrawn when they were previously outgoing
- Behaving 'inappropriately' – for example, making tactless comments, joking at the 'wrong' moments, being rude, 'losing' their inhibitions – for example, exhibiting sexual behaviour in public
- Displaying changes in usual behaviour and responses to situations – for example, quickly becoming very animated, emotional or aggressive
- Having slow and/or hesitant speech

- Appearing to have difficulty in producing speech – for example, a person may stutter before they can get the right word out
- Having impaired understanding of complex sentences, but not necessarily with single words
- Having difficulty recognising and naming familiar people or common objects

What can be done to help?

- Medication to treat episodes of agitation or aggression
- Anti-depressants
- Maintaining general good health
- Counselling
- Support groups
- Family Support
- Exercise
- Meaningful activity – helping the person to do all the things they enjoy or need to do
- Routine and structure
- Speech and Language Therapy