

Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease (CJD)

What is it?

- A rare disease of the brain that causes brain damage that gets worse over time and then causes death.
- In CJD, the structure of a normal brain protein changes slightly forming prions. The build up of prions causes brain damage.
- CJD can only be confirmed by examining the brain (autopsy) after death. Doctors can suspect if it is CJD by what symptoms the person has.
- There are different types of CJD:

Classical CJD is the most common type. Most times the cause is unknown. Sometimes classical CJD is inherited from family. Very rarely, the disease is spread through contaminated medical procedures.

People with classical CJD may have these symptoms:

- behavioural changes
- loss of balance and incoordination
- blindness
- difficulty walking or speaking
- weakness
- muscle spasm

Confusion in the early stages usually progresses to dementia. The symptoms get worse over time, and death usually happens weeks to months after the symptoms start.

Variant CJD (vCJD) is thought to be related to eating bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE) contaminated beef. It is often called mad cow disease. People with vCJD tend to be younger and have a slower rate of brain damage. They tend to have more psychiatric symptoms or personality changes than those with classical CJD.

How is it spread?

- CJD can be spread through some medical procedures such as corneal transplants, dura mater grafts, pituitary hormones from CJD infected donors or contaminated surgical equipment.
- People can get vCJD by eating meat and animal parts that are infected with the bovine form of the disease. Unlike bacteria or viruses, prions cannot be killed by heat and chemicals.
- CJD cannot be spread by close or casual person-to-person contact or through the air.

Is there treatment for it?

- There is no known treatment or cure.

What can be done to prevent the spread of it?

- Hospital screening and infection prevention and control standards are in place to decrease the risk of spreading CJD.

For more information

Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease Foundation

www.cjdfoundation.org/fact.html

**Stop the spread of germs and infection.
Clean your hands.**

