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MADISON NEUROLOGY LLC

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Neurology Care 7 days a Week. Because Your Brain Matters.

Cerebral Amyloid Angiopathy (CAA)

Patient education guide · Stroke & Vascular · Madison Neurology LLC

What is it?

Cerebral amyloid angiopathy is a condition in which a protein called amyloid builds up in the walls of the brain's small arteries, making them fragile and prone to bleeding. It is a common cause of lobar brain hemorrhages in adults over 60 and can also contribute to memory and thinking problems.

How does it happen?

Amyloid-beta protein (the same protein involved in Alzheimer's disease) deposits in vessel walls with age. Most cases are sporadic; rare inherited forms exist. The reason some people develop heavy vessel deposits is not fully understood.

Common symptoms

- Often no symptoms until a bleed occurs
- Sudden lobar brain hemorrhage (bleeding near the brain's surface)
- Brief recurrent episodes of spreading numbness, tingling, or weakness ('amyloid spells')
- Gradual memory and thinking decline
- Small 'microbleeds' seen on MRI, sometimes without symptoms

How is it diagnosed?

Diagnosis is based on MRI findings (lobar microbleeds or past hemorrhages in a typical pattern) combined with age and clinical history, using standardized criteria. There is no simple blood test; brain biopsy is definitive but rarely needed.

How is it treated?

There is currently no treatment that removes vessel amyloid. Care focuses on blood pressure control to reduce bleeding risk, careful decisions about blood thinners (which raise hemorrhage risk), and

management of cognitive symptoms. Anti-amyloid immunotherapies used in Alzheimer's can increase bleeding risk in CAA and require specialist discussion.

What does the future hold?

Risk of recurrent brain hemorrhage is higher than average, so prevention strategies matter. Some people remain stable for years; others develop recurrent bleeds or progressive cognitive decline. Regular follow-up with a neurologist helps adapt treatment as the condition evolves.

Questions patients commonly ask

Q: Is CAA the same as Alzheimer's disease?

A: They are related — both involve amyloid — but in CAA the protein accumulates mainly in blood vessel walls. Many people with CAA do not have Alzheimer's dementia.

Q: Should I stop my aspirin or blood thinner?

A: Never stop on your own. Your doctors will weigh stroke/clot prevention against bleeding risk and decide together with you.

Q: Can it be inherited?

A: Rare hereditary forms exist, but the common age-related form is usually sporadic; family screening is not routinely needed.

National support groups & resources

- **Alzheimer's Association (24/7 Helpline)** — alz.org — 1-800-272-3900
- **American Stroke Association** — stroke.org — 1-888-478-7653
- **American Academy of Neurology — Brain & Life patient resources** — brainandlife.org

(Organization contact details were current at the time of compilation; please verify online.)

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