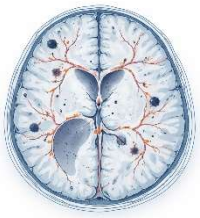
Ochsner Health

Ochsner Neurocognitive Program

Understanding Cerebral Amyloid Angiopathy (CAA)

What Is CAA?

Cerebral amyloid angiopathy (CAA) is a condition in which amyloid protein builds up in the brain's small blood vessels, making them more fragile over time. It is a vascular brain disease—not a memory disorder—and often overlaps with other age-related conditions such as Alzheimer's disease.



Is CAA the Same as Alzheimer's Disease?

No—but they are related.

- Alzheimer's disease affects **brain cells and networks**
- CAA affects **brain blood vessels**

Some people have one, the other, or both. Having CAA does not automatically mean someone has Alzheimer's disease, but the two often coexist. Because these conditions affect different parts of the brain, they can cause different symptoms—even when they occur together.

What Symptoms Can CAA Cause?

Symptoms vary widely depending on which areas of the brain are affected.

- Changes in thinking or processing speed
- Brief neurologic symptoms (sometimes called "amyloid spells")
- Headaches or fluctuations in cognition

What Can I Do to Reduce Risk?

There are no FDA-approved cures for CAA, so care focuses on reducing risk and supporting safety over time.

- Careful blood pressure control
- Thoughtful use of blood thinners or antiplatelet medications
- Fall prevention and balance support

Your care plan is individualized and may change over time.

What This Means?

CAA is a condition that requires awareness, monitoring, and partnership, not panic. Understanding CAA helps guide safer medical decisions and supports long-term planning while preserving independence as much as possible.

Key Points

- Many people with CAA never experience a major brain bleed
- Changes often happen slowly, and long periods of stability are common
- CAA affects brain blood vessels, not just memory
- Risk varies widely and depends on imaging findings, blood pressure, and medications
- Care focuses on safety, monitoring, and risk reduction—not emergency treatment
- Decisions are made with you, based on your goals, function, and overall health

Learn More?

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Vascular Health and the Brain

The brain depends on healthy blood vessels to deliver oxygen and nutrients and remove waste. When blood flow is steady, the brain works more smoothly. When blood vessels are strained or damaged, thinking, balance, and memory can be affected over time.

Vascular health matters **at every stage**—from normal aging to memory disorders.

Why It Matters

Problems with blood vessels can:

- Slow thinking and processing speed
- Affect attention and planning
- Increase fatigue or confusion
- Make the brain more vulnerable to other conditions, including Alzheimer's disease

Many people have **more than one cause** of cognitive change. Supporting vascular health helps reduce extra stress on the brain.

What Helps Most

- **Blood pressure:** Avoiding pressure that is too high *or* too low protects small brain vessels
- **Blood sugar:** Stable blood sugar protects blood vessels over time
- **Cholesterol:** Managing cholesterol supports vessel health throughout the body
- **Sleep:** Good sleep supports brain repair and blood flow regulation
- **Physical activity:** Regular movement improves blood flow and brain communication
- **Heart health:** Treating heart rhythm or circulation problems supports brain blood flow
- **Smoking & alcohol:** Avoid smoking; use alcohol cautiously

Small, consistent steps matter more than big changes.

What Vascular Care Can—and Cannot—Do

- **It helps by:** reducing stress on the brain, supporting stability and safety, and preserving function longer.
- **It does not:** cure dementia, restore lost memory, or guarantee symptoms will not change.

Even so, vascular care remains one of the **most helpful and controllable** ways to support brain health.

A Simple Way to Think About It

What helps the heart and blood vessels also helps the brain.
Supporting vascular health strengthens the brain's ability to function and adapt over time—even when memory problems are already present.

Learn More?