

Five-minute Neurological Examination for Patients with Possible Dementia

Key focuses

- Look for any signs of structural brain disease.
- Try to interpret the cause as this can influence treatment options (see Interpretation column in below table).

Note: It is unusual in Alzheimer's disease to have any focal neurological deficits or motor skill problems until late in the disease. In the early stages examination is usually normal.		
Examination	Looking for	Interpretation (consider)
Gait and general appearance	Parkinson's disease, eg, shuffling gait, reduced arm-swing, reduced facial expressions, low speech volume	Dementia with Lewy Bodies
	Unsteady or wide based gait	Cerebrovascular disease
		Normal pressure hydrocephalus (ask about incontinence)
Cranial nerves		
Eye movements	Asymmetry/Diplopia	Structural brain lesion
Facial nerve	Asymmetry	Structural brain lesion or diffuse. Cerebrovascular disease
Peripheral exam		
Tone	Parkinson's disease with lead pipe or cog-wheel rigidity	Dementia with Lewy Bodies
		Cerebrovascular disease / structural brain lesion
Reflexes	Increased or asymmetry	Cerebrovascular disease / structural brain lesion
Power, initially test finger extension / hip flexion. If weakness detected perform more thorough examination of power	Weakness or asymmetry	Cerebrovascular disease / structural brain lesion
Coordination (rapid alternating hand movement)	Dysdiadochokinesia	Parkinson's disease / diffuse Cerebrovascular disease if bilateral
		Structural brain lesion if unilateral

In summary, look for:

- Parkinson's disease – suggests Dementia with Lewy Bodies (DLB). Ask about hallucinations.
- Hyper-reflexia / hypertonia / motor problems – suggests diffuse cerebrovascular disease.
- Asymmetry – this may indicate structural brain disease and a CT Head will be required.

Please note: These are the instructions for the four northern region DHBs (Northland DHB, Waitemata DHB, Auckland DHB, and Counties Manukau DHB). GPs in other regions of New Zealand: check your respective Cognitive Impairment Pathway as instructions may vary in your area.