

Wernicke-Korsakoff Syndrome

National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke (NINDS)

Source

National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke (NINDS). [Wernicke-Korsakoff Syndrome Information Page](#).

Wernicke's encephalopathy is a degenerative brain disorder caused by the lack of thiamine (vitamin B1). It may result from alcohol abuse, dietary deficiencies, prolonged vomiting, eating disorders, or the effects of chemotherapy. B1 deficiency causes damage to the brain's thalamus and hypothalamus. Symptoms include mental confusion, vision problems, coma, hypothermia, low blood pressure, and lack of muscle coordination (ataxia). Korsakoff syndrome (also called Korsakoff's amnesic syndrome) is a memory disorder that results from vitamin B1 deficiency and is associated with alcoholism. Korsakoff's syndrome damages nerve cells and supporting cells in the brain and spinal cord, as well as the part of the brain involved with memory. Symptoms include amnesia, tremor, coma, disorientation, and vision problems. The disorder's main features are problems in acquiring new information or establishing new memories, and in retrieving previous memories. Although Wernicke's and Korsakoff's are related disorders, some scientists believe them to be different stages of the same disorder, which is called Wernicke-Korsakoff syndrome. Wernicke's encephalopathy represents the "acute" phase of the disorder and Korsakoff's amnesic syndrome represents the disorder progressing to a "chronic" or long-lasting stage.