

This podcast does not provide medical or legal advice. Please listen to the complete disclosure at the end of the recording. Hello, possums, and welcome to Everyone Dies, the podcast where we talk about serious illness, dying, death, and bereavement.

I'm Marianne Matzo, a nurse practitioner, and I use my experience from working as a nurse for 45 years to help answer your questions about what will happen at the end of life. Well, or what could happen. Well, well, I mean, I think at the end of life, we can guarantee that you'll be dead.

So there we are. Something we can all agree with. Well, but it's the, it's, it's the road, it's the road to getting there.

That's true. It's not about the destination. It is about the journey.

That's right. Um, speaking of Charlie, that's, that's me. I'm Charlie Navarrette, an actor in New York City, and here to offer an every person viewpoint to our podcast.

We are both here because we believe that the more you know, the better prepared you will be to make difficult decisions. So please relax and get yourself something to eat and drink. You don't want any low blood sugar while we're talking with you.

And thank you for spending the next hour with Charlie and me. In the first half, Charlie has the recipe of the week and a discussion about Van Gogh, or if you're in a Woody Allen movie, Van Gogh. Van Gogh.

Um, and in the second half, I'm going to be talking about vascular dementia. We explain what vascular dementia is, some common symptoms, and how it compares to Alzheimer's disease, risk factors, and treatment options. And in our third half, Charlie has a poem about remembering by L.E. Mastelak.

So Charles, how are you? Hot, hot, hot, hot. Which, which, which I guess is one thing, but hot and humid is something different. Yeah, it's nuts.

But you there in Okey, in Okey, Oklahoma. Yeah, you got it worse. We all, we always have it worse, no matter what it is you're talking about.

Politics, health indexes. Yeah, it's. How much we earn.

Yeah, yeah. So yeah, but even here, I mean, the weather is just like everywhere. I mean, crazier.

You know, I sent you that picture of what's the capital of Vermont? Montpelier. I mean, Montpelier is, I mean, flooded out. This is insane.

It really is. And for the people who are listening to this in the middle of winter, you say, oh my God, wouldn't that be so nice? Some rain and some heat. This isn't August.

It's July. There we are. We're roughly at about the middle of July in, what year is this? I don't know how we got to the middle of July.

It was just January. You first get through January and then another step forward, it's February and so on. So what's our recipe, Charles? Well, we try to.

Have our funeral lunch recipes go along with our weekly topic. But this recipe will never fit into our topics. But it is just too good not to share this week.

Our recipe is. Pig picking cake. That's what I get for missing staff meetings.

Yes. You heard that correctly. I miss staff meetings.

Layers of yellow cake. You can use a box cake and no one will be the wiser. Are stacked.

Are stacked with a fruity frosting of whipped topping. Pineapple, vanilla, instant pudding and pecans to form a cake that's as unique as its name. While nobody is quite sure where this cake earned its name.

The pig picking cake pays homage to the traditional. Southern pig picking. And everyone, I'm sure, is on their edge of their seats, wondering, Charlie, what is that? I'm glad you asked.

It's so southern pig picking a hog roast. That's essentially an early version of the barbecue. Well, I can get down with that.

It's easy to make an impressive offering to bring to a funeral lunch. Leave the sides unfrosted to reveal all the creamy, fluffy goodness. Of the cake's thick layers.

Voila. Now, I like when you say voila. We have such gusto.

Oui. Now, I don't know why, but you will not find pig picking cake at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. The Met, however, has brought together 24 Vincent van Gogh or van Gogh paintings featuring cypress trees.

It seems logical that Vincent van, the most famous depressive in all of art, adopted the Mediterranean cypress tree as a motif. The tall, tapered, cone-shaped evergreen has always carried associations of mourning and death. It stands guard in Christian, Jewish, and Muslim cemeteries across southern Europe and the Near East.

Van Gogh, who committed suicide at age 37, began painting cypresses toward the end of his life. At the time, the Dutch-born artist was living in the south of France and turning out some of his strongest works. The Met exhibition unfolds slowly, with cypresses initially poking up as generic foliage in the far distance of his landscapes from Arles, but he zeroed in on the motif in the summer of 1889 after suffering a mental collapse and voluntarily entering the asylum at Saint-Rémy-de-Provence.

Confined at first to the hospital grounds, he painted views of the fields outside his iron-barred bedroom window, and he studied blue irises in the garden. His collapse followed an invitation van Gogh offered fellow artist Paul Gauguin to stay with him in the yellow house in Arles. Instead of lifting van Gogh's mood, the visit was a disaster, leading to the alarming ear-cutting incident and his incarceration at the asylum.

It was after this that van Gogh painted *Starry Night*, one of the most celebrated landscape paintings in all of art history, and it includes cypress trees. When he painted the cypress trees, there were always two together, the smaller leaning on the larger tree. There is no documented reason why.

Some suggest they could be a mother tree with her child expressing emotional connection and nurturing. Or maybe he was coming to the end of his life. He was seeking connection and support.

You know, I was looking at his art, and I mean, I've seen *Starry Night*, you know, a lot, but I never really noticed the cypress trees in there until I was looking for the cypress trees. It's like, oh, they're even in *Starry Night*. Yeah.

Yeah, so I've looked at different paintings, and like you, I didn't notice until I really looked at it, and yes, it just seems to be a theme, and just that notion of, you know, leaning, you know, one tree leaning against the other for support. Yeah. So, folks, please go to our web page for this week's recipe of Pig Picking Cake and additional resources for this program.

Your tax-deductible donations are always welcome so that we can continue to offer you quality programming. Thank you in advance for making your donation at www.everyonedies.org. That's every the number one dies.org. Marianne? Thanks, Charlie. So, what is vascular dementia, and how is it different from other types of dementia? Well, that's what we're going to try to answer for you today.

Vascular dementia is the second most common cause of dementia after Alzheimer's disease. It's not Alzheimer's disease, although vascular dementia and Alzheimer's disease are hard to differentiate, to tell the difference between, and also somebody could be a person, one individual could be diagnosed with both diseases. People with vascular dementia have problems with reasoning, judgment, and memory.

These symptoms can appear suddenly, or they could be mild at first and gradually worsen. It can be challenging to diagnose because it can occur together with Alzheimer's, and the symptoms can vary from

person to person. There are some differences between vascular dementia and Alzheimer's disease.

One of the main ones is the early symptoms. In Alzheimer's disease, it's usually forgetfulness. In vascular dementia, this usually isn't the case.

Instead, early symptoms tend to include slow thought, problems concentrating, making decisions, following directions, planning, and organizing. These two diseases become more similar as vascular dementia progresses. Vascular dementia is caused by a stroke or what's called a transient ischemic attack, or TIA.

We have a few shows about strokes that you could listen to and look at the show notes to get the links. Simply explained, a stroke happens when the blood flow to the area of the brain is cut off. When this happens, the brain cells that have had no oxygen will die.

When brain cells die during a stroke, abilities controlled by that area of brain are lost, like memory and muscle control. A TIA could be referred to as a mini-stroke, which is caused by a serious temporary blood clot. It's a warning stroke and should be taken seriously.

With TIAs, you can get back a lot of function, but if you continue to have TIAs, you're going to gradually lose your function. So please, if you have a TIA, which is like a stroke, but then you feel better like right away and you can, in general, kind of go about your business again, please go to your healthcare practitioner because if you've had one, your chances of having more are pretty high. In vascular dementia, symptoms begin suddenly.

About 20% of people who have a stroke will develop vascular dementia within six months. Whether or not changes in thinking, memory, or mental ability occur will depend on the area of the brain that the stroke affected. The extent of the stroke can influence the severity of the symptoms.

Now, how quickly vascular dementia occurs depends on the cause. When it results from a stroke, symptoms are more likely to begin suddenly. There are also chronic illnesses that can gradually cause

problems with cognition, especially when the underlying cause is a chronic blood vessel problem.

This can include such conditions as atherosclerosis, which is commonly known as hardening of the arteries, autoimmune vascular diseases, such as vasculitis, which is an inflammation of blood vessels, diabetes, and high blood pressure. These chronic conditions narrow the small blood vessels throughout the entire brain, progressively depriving brain tissue of vital oxygen. Vascular dementia due to these problems can result in subtle changes over time.

This type of disease progression is less dramatic than the sudden changes after a stroke, which tends to affect that specific region of the brain supplied by the blood vessels. Another cause of vascular dementia is a series of mini strokes, the TIAs I mentioned, caused by interrupted blood supply to the brain. Vascular dementia stages or steps characterize this form of the disease.

Symptoms aren't sudden or gradual, but instead have a step-by-step progress. With each TIA, additional symptoms appear or worsen. Then symptoms remain stable for a period of time until the next TIA.

So what are the risk factors for vascular dementia? They are being over age 65, having had a stroke, a TIA, or a heart attack, high blood pressure, and high cholesterol, diabetes, heart or blood vessel disease, hardening of the arteries, smoking, drinking alcohol in excess, or an abnormal heart rhythm. Now there's documented seven stages of vascular dementia progression which begin to show life-altering symptoms at about stage 5. So there's seven stages and things kind of get, you know, difficult or needing a lot more help at about stage 5. But I put the scale in the show notes if you're interested, but I think what's important to know is that regardless of how the disease progresses, people in the later stages of vascular dementia will show overall decline in their thinking and physical abilities. This will make them dependent on others for their day-to-day care.

The care needed will continue to increase over time, and at some point the disease will progress to a point where specialized care is necessary. People with dementia of any kind often really do best in a long-term

care facility that specializes in memory care. And I've been working with people and families dealing with Alzheimer's disease for God, 30 years, and I'll tell you that I still continue to see people saying, I want to take care of that at home.

I want to do this at home. And that's for us because the person who has these diseases really doesn't know. And in fact, that, and I've seen this time and time and time again, the caregiver just frets about putting them in memory care.

And then this person gets to memory care and there's other people around and there's, you know, security in terms of, you know, the people, the 24-hour staff, and a lot of people to kind of spread the love around. And it's a nurturing environment for people and people do really, really well. So if you're listening to this and you're saying, oh my God, I'm overwhelmed with my caregiving duties, but I just don't want to put mom, dad, and my husband into memory care, you might want to really think about that because people do very well.

You should talk to your healthcare practitioner early in the disease so that you have some time to explore your options. This can avoid feeling rushed to find the right place for your loved one to receive care. It can also ease your mind to know that you have options should you begin to feel overwhelmed by providing care at home.

On average, people with vascular dementia will live for five years after symptoms get started, less than the average for people with Alzheimer's disease. In many cases, their death will be caused by a heart attack or a stroke. There is substantial evidence that treatments of common risk factors can help postpone or even prevent further decline.

And here are some ways to treat the risk factors and at the same time prevent vascular dementia from occurring. And this list of things that we talk about all the time, and I don't know if you guys sometimes wonder why do they talk about health promotion kinds of things when this is a podcast about dying and death? Well, the fact is, is that like, for example, in the case of vascular dementia, if you know you have that problem, and you start addressing the issues, the causes, you can prevent or delay the final stroke or whatever it is and the symptoms. So

what are those things? Try to keep heart healthy, follow a heart healthy diet can improve or slow down your vascular dementia symptoms.

Walking 30 minutes a day can reduce your risk of vascular dementia. Regular exercise can help control your weight, boost your overall health, and relieve stress. And in my experience of taking care of patients, it's like the one thing that you tell them that this is really important, and they'll say, yeah, but there's something else I can do because we don't like to have to get up and move.

But it makes a big difference. Keep your cholesterol, blood pressure, and blood sugar levels under control. And that can be done with lifestyle changes, it can be done with the help of medication, but it has to stay under control.

Have more fun. For example, playing, laughing, enjoying your life are great ways to relieve stress and worry and prevent further strokes and make up for memory and cognitive losses. Manage your stress and know how to relax yourself.

It's helpful to follow relaxation techniques including meditation, yoga, deep breathing, and we've done shows on just about all those things. Do not smoke, really. We still have to say that, but I guess we do.

Stop smoking. And limit your alcohol consumption. Currently, there are no treatments available to treat the changes from vascular dementia damages.

Prevention and early diagnosis can help you find ways to improve and even slow down vascular dementia symptoms. If you look at our podcast titles, you'll see that we offer you shows about exercise, healthy lifestyle, mindfulness, mental health. And while we know that everyone dies, research data supports that these lifestyle changes have the potential to delay the hour of our death.

Any thoughts about all that, Charles? In terms of what you were saying, with your family members or your significant other who can be there for you, you go to a facility to help with memory loss. I've come across many, many people who don't have that support, who maybe are

estranged from family members or there's no family members to speak of. A lot of folks are just concerned.

They're alone. There's literally no one they can turn to and just are concerned if they're just going to be stuck in their little overpriced apartment and no one they can turn to. Not just here in New York, but across America, people are just living more and more, not isolated, well, several are, but also just more and more alone.

People are uncomfortable just reaching out. The nice thing about New York, there are a lot of services around. So I tell them, contact this service, contact these folks.

You have to get up and look after yourself, not just sit there and wait for things to happen, but to take action, just to protect yourself as much as you can. And of course, everything you're saying, just different lifestyle choices as well. Yeah.

I hope this is helpful for our listeners. Yeah. So here in our third half, featuring a poem by L.E. Masterlock entitled, I Know Who You Are When You Don't.

The look of recognition fades, worry crosses your face. It's confusing to see me this way, familiar, but with an aged mask. Your memory tells you I'm small, still a child, whose hand you hold.

I know who I am when you don't. Far away, that look in your eyes, are you seeing into the past? Visions of people and places where you remember being last. What year is this? What month or day? Wasn't it summer yesterday? I know when you are, when you don't.

Hands fidget nervously. Somehow you think you know me. Look around, strange surroundings.

Why have I brought you here? You long for home, but no longer understand home is right here. I know where you are when you don't. I squeeze your hand, you pat it.

Eyes close and body relax. May you dream happy remembrance far away from anxieties. Though confusion your existence, feel my love, calm and safety, here with me because I love you.

I know you are loved when you don't. When you wake, we'll look at old pictures. Remember those people you love.

We'll sing Sinatra and tap feet to rhythm. You'll smile again. Your eyes will crinkle and sparkle.

Now there's a person I know. I know who you are when you don't. Yeah, it's comforting to know that there are people who will remember us when we don't remember ourselves, either because of disease or grief or depression or anything that makes us really forget who we are.

Yeah. And that can happen many times throughout our lives. Yep.

But we're always there somewhere. Somewhere. Yeah, somewhere.

Yep. So, that's it for this week's episode. Please stay tuned for the continuing saga of Everyone Dies, and thank you for listening.

This is Charlie Navarette, and from writer Gabriel Garcia Marquez, the opening sentence of his novel, 100 Years of Solitude. Many years later, as he faced the firing squad, Colonel Ariano Buénido was to remember that distant afternoon when his father took him to discover ice. And I'm Marianne Matzo, and we'll see you next week.

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