

CLN6 Disease, Variant Late-Infantile

Are there any alternative names?

CLN6 disease, variant late-infantile was one of the first variant types of Neuronal Ceroid Lipofuscinoses (NCLs) to be identified and was originally termed early Juvenile Batten disease.

What are Neuronal Ceroid Lipofuscinoses (NCLs)?

These refer to several different genetic life-limiting neurodegenerative diseases that share similar features. Although the different forms of NCL are sometimes described according to the age of the child at the onset of the disease, they are now better classified according to the gene identified as the cause e.g. CLN6 (gene) disease, variant late-infantile (age of onset), CLN3 (gene) disease, juvenile (age of onset).

What causes NCL?

Since the first genes causing NCL were identified in 1995, over 400 mutations in 14 different genes have been described that cause the various forms of NCL disease. Our cells contain thousands of genes that are lined up along chromosomes. Human cells contain 23 pairs of chromosomes (46 in total). Most genes control the manufacture of at least one protein. These proteins have different functions and include enzymes that act to speed up molecular chemical reactions. The NCLs are caused by abnormal genes, which are unable to produce the required proteins. As a result, the cells do not work properly and

this leads to the development of symptoms associated with these diseases.

What specifically causes CLN6 disease?

The gene called CLN6 was identified as the cause of disease in 1997, and lies on chromosome 15. It encodes a protein whose function is not well understood. The protein is found in the cell in a structure called the Endoplasmic Reticulum (ER). This is a network of flattened tubular membranes similar to the cell membrane, but inside the cell. One of the functions of the ER is to assemble and package proteins that are then transported to other parts of the cell or released outside of the cell. Another function makes the lipids (fats) that are found in all membranes within the cell.

Many different mutations (mistakes) in the CLN6 gene have now been identified in late-infantile variant patients, all resulting in abnormal storage of proteins and lipids (fats) in neurons (nerve cells) and other cells. The cells cannot function properly and this leads to the development of the symptoms associated with CLN6 disease.

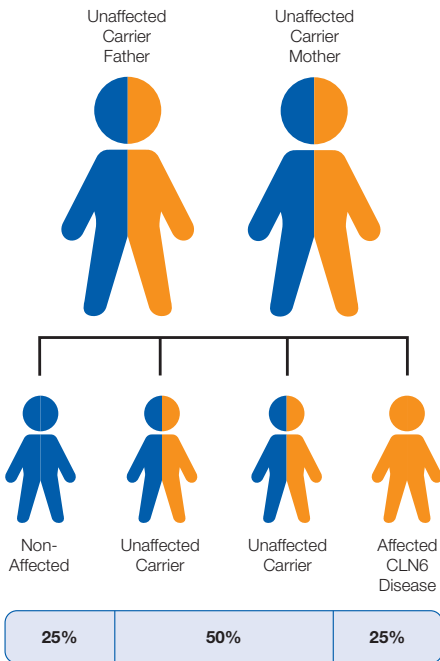
How are NCLs inherited?

Most forms of NCL are inherited as "autosomal recessive" disorders. This is one of several ways that a trait, disorder, or disease can be passed down through families. An autosomal recessive disorder means that both copies of the gene are abnormal (one inherited from each parent)

with neither working properly. The disease does not depend on the sex of an individual.

What are the chances of inheriting CLN6 disease?

CLN6 disease is inherited as an autosomal recessive disorder, which means that both chromosomes carry mutations in the CLN6 gene. Therefore both biological parents of a child with this diagnosis will be carriers of the disease but physically unaffected by it.



A child born to parents, who both carry the autosomal recessive mutation in the CLN6 gene, has a 25% (1 in 4) chance of inheriting the abnormal malfunctioning genes from both parents and developing CLN6 disease.

They will have a 50% (1 in 2) chance of inheriting one abnormal gene, which would make them a carrier who is unaffected by

the disease. There is a 25% (1 in 4) chance of the child being born with two normal genes and therefore being non-affected (not a carrier).

When it is known that both parents are carriers of the abnormal gene, we refer to there being a 2 in 3 chance of a child being a carrier, once it is established that they are unaffected by the disease.

With any pregnancy, the probability of a child inheriting one or both genes from their parents is the same each time, irrespective of any sibling's status.

How is it diagnosed?

Children will probably have been seen by a paediatrician and paediatric neurologist because of symptoms such as seizures. A number of investigations will have been done to look for the cause of the seizures.

The diagnosis of variant late-infantile CLN6 disease is usually made by tests on blood samples. A skin biopsy may be necessary and when viewed with an electron microscope, blood and skin samples will usually show abnormal storage bodies in the cells. The abnormal storage material takes on a mixed appearance with granular osmiophilic deposits (GRODS), curvilinear bodies (CVB), rectilinear profiles (RLP), and/or fingerprint profiles (FPP).

How common is it?

Approximately 1 - 2 children are diagnosed with variant late-infantile CLN6 disease each year in the UK. We estimate there are currently less than 8 affected children in the UK. Children have been diagnosed with this condition in many countries and from a variety of ethnic backgrounds.

What are the symptoms and how does the disease progress?

Children appear to be healthy and developing normally for the first few years of life. Children with variant late-infantile CLN6 disease can be very different from each other, making the disease course difficult to predict in individual cases. The first symptoms may be apparent early on in life, though might not be evident until after school entry. Developmental progress may begin to slow down and some children will be delayed in the development of their language skills. Challenging behaviour may be seen at an early stage, before other symptoms and so it is often only linked to the disease after diagnosis is made.

Usually the onset of epilepsy will take place between 18 months and 8 years of age. The seizures may be varying in nature and include drops, vacant spells (absences) or motor seizures with violent jerking of the limbs and loss of consciousness. Initially, seizures may be successfully managed with medication, yet they will always recur and often become difficult to control.

Children become unsteady on their feet and may frequently fall. Gradually, skills related to walking, playing and speech are lost with children becoming less able and increasingly dependent.

Later, children with variant late-infantile CLN6 disease usually have myoclonic (rapid involuntary muscle spasm) jerks of their limbs and are prone to erratic movements of their head (nods). They may have difficulty sleeping and often become distressed around this time, usually without obvious reason. One to two years after seizures begin vision gradually deteriorates, with its loss being ultimately inevitable.

Children and young people affected by Batten disease will develop childhood dementia, resulting in increasing learning difficulties, difficulties with short term memory, unusual behaviours, poor concentration, difficulties in sleeping, mood swings, hallucinations, confusion and anxiety. Although short term memory skills decline, long term memory remains largely intact and remains a strength.

The nature of the disease means that children will become completely dependent on families and carers for all of their daily needs although the rate of progression to this state can vary significantly between individuals. In order to ensure they receive adequate nutrition, they may require a specialist feeding tube (gastrostomy). There may be noticeable stiffening of their arms and legs, whilst some children become prone to frequent chest infections.

Sadly most children who have variant late-infantile CLN6 disease die during late childhood or their teenage years, though there are exceptions.

Are there any treatments?

Currently there is no cure for CLN6 disease and therefore specialist symptom management and therapy is essential to assist in maintaining a good quality of life for children and their families. Holistic support for parents, siblings and wider family members is extremely important throughout their journey.

Epilepsy can be difficult to treat and therefore obtaining complete control of seizures is not always possible. Anticonvulsant medications will be necessary from the early stages of the disease process which may respond to valproic acid, lamotrigine and clobazam.

Myoclonic jerks (involuntary muscle spasms) are common, but should not be confused with epileptic seizures. Levetiracetam, Piracetam and Zonisimide may be helpful for the treatment of myoclonus. They can interfere with rest and sleep as well as being distressing for children and their families.

Spasticity (unusually tight or stiff muscles) can be managed with Baclofen. In order for medication to be sufficient the responsible doctor may need to prescribe higher dosages than are usual.

Various professionals including doctors, nurses, physiotherapists, occupational therapists, speech and language therapists should be involved in the care of children with CLN6 disease. They will work collaboratively and in conjunction with the family to provide a holistic approach to care.

Support and treatment will be needed for a range of issues including progressive difficulties with chewing and swallowing, constipation, hydration, respiratory function, oral secretions, motor disorder and sleep disturbance. Attention to posture, seating, skin and mouth care is essential and children will require additional nutritional support that may include consideration of a gastrostomy.

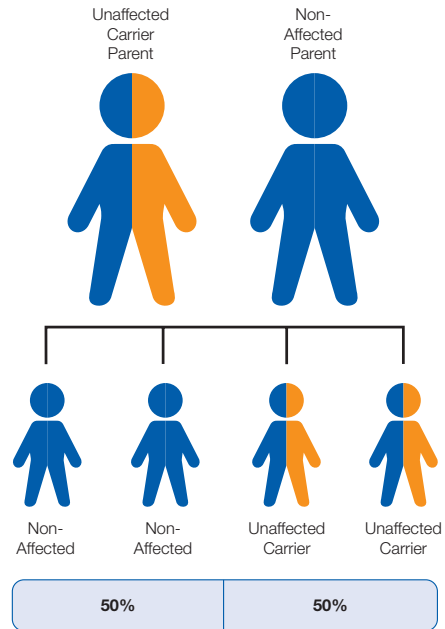
What research is being done?

Research into possible methods for treating the disease is ongoing with various theoretical approaches being considered and investigated. All are currently at very early stages of development. Gene therapy for CLN6 disease is being investigated, which aims to introduce a copy of the defective gene into cells so that they can then produce a correct functioning protein.

For updates and information regarding developments in research please visit the BDFA website: www.bdfa-uk.org.uk or contact the **BDFA Scientific Officer** via **0800 046 9832**
email: research@bdfa-uk.org.uk

What are the genetic considerations?

The age that variant late-infantile CLN6 disease is usually diagnosed in a child means that some families will have younger siblings who may be affected but have not displayed any symptoms.



It may also be possible that older unaffected siblings are carriers of the disease and may want to understand how CLN6 disease may affect their family choices when they are older.

When only one parent is a carrier of the abnormal gene, and the other is non-

affected, there is a 50% (1 in 2) chance that any child will be an unaffected carrier.

If parents are considering having additional children, they can access specialist advice and support from their local clinical genetics service following a referral from their GP. Prenatal testing may be possible in the early stages of any future pregnancy.

Is support available to families?

As soon as possible following a diagnosis of variant late-infantile CLN6 disease, families should be offered support from various professionals attached to their local health, social, educational services and the BDFA Support and Advocacy Partner. Ideally a "Team Around the Child" will be formed, with one of the professionals appointed as a Keyworker for the family.

The child's needs should be discussed with the parents and assessed by the team. The team will work together to ensure that the child and family receive the on-going care and support they need and that their choices are taken into account.

A child and family's needs will inevitably change as the disease progresses. As such, it is often helpful if a clear process for regular planned reviews is identified and that a system is established for enabling additional reviews as and when they are deemed necessary. As the rate or pattern of the progression of the disease for each child remains uncertain, an individualised plan of care and support is essential.

The BDFA is able to provide various forms of holistic support and can be contacted via **0800 046 9832**
email: support@bdfa-uk.org.uk

How can families manage the financial challenges?

Caring for a child with variant late-infantile CLN6 disease will bring additional financial challenges. It is vital that families are well informed about the full level of economic assistance available and the support that they are entitled to. They may well need help and guidance in accessing benefits and other sources of assistance. The professionals and services supporting the family should provide advice and guidance. The BDFA can also support families with these issues in various ways, their Small Grants Scheme being one particular example.

What are the practical implications for the family?

As the illness progresses, specialist equipment and aids will become necessary and this is another area where the family will need help. Items are likely to include specialist seating, buggies/wheelchairs, bathing and toileting aids, hoisting equipment and a specialist bed/mattress. Professionals will play a key role in ensuring that these and other items are provided in a timely manner following proper assessment of the individual child's needs.

It is likely that changes will be needed in the home environment to enable the family to appropriately care for a child with variant late-infantile CLN6 disease. These may include installing ramps, widening doorways and providing suitable floor surfaces. A purpose-built wet room with a specialist bath or shower is commonly needed and there are various other aspects that will require consideration.

There are grants and funds available to ensure that the work involved is affordable.

An occupational therapist will consult on all aspects of any adaptations and assist the family in undertaking this process.

Will there be an impact on the child's education?

Education will continue to be important for the child and family and there will be many aspects that require consideration and significant assistance from those around them.

Education, Health and Care Plans have now replaced statements. All children and young people with an NCL diagnosis will require an Education, Health and Care Plan. These plans are personalised plans that should meet the education health and care needs of the child or young person.

The new Children and Families legislation which came into force in September 2014 has introduced major reforms in provision for children and young people with Special Educational needs (SEN). The introduction of the single 0-25 Education, Health and Care should help children, young people and families affected by NCL. Despite these it remains probable that many parents will continue to need guidance, understanding and support when trying to navigate the process of "statementing".

The BDFA has expertise in this field and can be approached by any parties seeking information or help.

The BDFA Educational Advisor may be able to provide specific support and can be contacted via **0800 046 9832**
email: education@bdfa-uk.org.uk

In what other ways can families be supported?

The realities of caring for a child who has variant late-infantile CLN6 disease can place enormous strain on a family, both physical and emotional. It will impact upon all members in numerous ways and so being made aware that support is available to groups and individuals to help with the challenges that will be faced is important. This support extends to wider family members and step-relatives.

There are several options to consider should families wish to explore ways of maximising the limited time available to share with their children. Contacting a charitable wish-granting organisation may lead to them being able to create some valuable and significant memories.

Where can I get additional information and support?

The BDFA offers support to any family member, friend, professional or organisation involved in caring for a child with variant late-infantile CLN6 disease or any other form of NCL throughout the UK. We provide informed guidance and assistance as well as seeking to actively increase awareness of the disease and facilitate future research to identify potential therapies and ultimately a cure.

We organise conferences and workshops and are able to arrange connections with other affected families. The BDFA also coordinates a small grants scheme that can provide assistance for a range of needs.

The BDFA has a Support and Advocacy Partner who is able to assist with many of the issues highlighted in this document and

can discuss each of them in greater detail and on a more personal basis.

They can be contacted via our
Freephone Helpline: **0800 046 9832**
or email: **support@bdfa-uk.org.uk**

There are a number of local and national organisations that are also able to offer various forms of support and information that will be relevant to families. The BDFa can provide details and information about them.

It may also be appropriate for a referral to be made to a local children's hospice service, as this can offer an additional experienced and skilled source of holistic support.

NOTES