



CANCERcare®

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fact sheet

COPING WITH CHEMOBRAIN: KEEPING YOUR MEMORY SHARP

Many people going through cancer treatment notice changes in their memory and thinking abilities. Coping with these symptoms, which are often described as chemobrain, involves finding ways to help yourself remember things and activities that keep your memory sharp.

WHAT IS CHEMOBRAIN?

Chemobrain, or cancer-related cognitive dysfunction, refers to changes in memory, attention and other mental functions in those undergoing various forms of cancer treatment. Once attributed exclusively to chemotherapy, chemobrain is now thought to be caused by a variety of factors including cancer itself. While there is no specific treatment for chemobrain yet, there are some practical options to help you manage potential memory problems and reduce stress.

MEMORY STRATEGIES

Keep a Memory Planner. Use a simple notebook, daily planner or smart phone to keep track of important information all in one place, such as to-do lists, days, times and addresses for appointments, important telephone numbers, medication schedules and a log of chemobrain symptoms or other side effects to discuss with your medical team. Put your contact details in your notebook in case it's misplaced and keep backups of all important information in a safe place.

Make a checklist of daily reminders. Put it on your refrigerator or even on your bathroom mirror so you'll be sure to look at it several times a day.

Sleep. Make sure you get plenty of rest. This will give you more energy and clarity for the day ahead. Short power naps can help, too.

Get moving. Regular physical activity improves blood flow to the brain and is linked to improved memory.



Eat well. A healthy diet is good for your body, can make you feel more alert and is linked to lower rates of memory decline.

Keep your mind active. Do crossword puzzles, Sudoku or take a class for fun to learn something new. These keep your mind engaged and prepared for more vital tasks.

Train yourself to focus. Slow down and pay attention to one thing at a time. Picture what you're doing and describe it out loud to yourself. These visual and auditory cues give your memory an extra boost.

Avoid distractions. Work, read and do your thinking in an uncluttered, peaceful environment. Have conversations in quiet places to help you concentrate better and recall what was said more easily.

Organize your environment. Keep personal items in designated places so you'll always know where they are, such as keys and cell phone on a table by the front door.

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Repeat information aloud and write down important points. If possible, follow up with a text or email to confirm you have all the correct details.

Use mnemonics. These memory strategies involve a silly phrase, image or rhyme to jog your memory, such as “30 days hath September...”

Chew gum. Research shows that chewing gum can keep you more alert and improve attention and memory.

SHARE WITH OTHERS

It is important to tell loved ones and members of your care team what you are going through. There is no shame in dealing with the side effects of treatment, and letting people know that you may be forgetful or distracted is an important step to making things better.

GETTING HELP

If symptoms of chemobrain make you anxious or sad, or they interfere with everyday functioning, don't wait to seek help.

- Speak with an oncology social worker. Oncology social workers, such as those at CancerCare, can help you find ways to cope and connect you to additional resources.
- Tell your doctor about your concerns to deal with contributing factors, such as sleep problems or persistent pain.
- Ask for a referral to a neuropsychologist for a comprehensive evaluation of your mental and emotional functioning and specific treatment recommendations.



CancerCare® Can Help

Founded in 1944, CancerCare is the leading national organization providing free support services and information to help people manage the emotional, practical and financial challenges of cancer. Our comprehensive services include case management, counseling and support groups over the phone, online and in-person, educational workshops, publications and financial and co-payment assistance. All CancerCare services are provided by master's-prepared oncology social workers and world-leading cancer experts.

To learn more, visit www.cancercare.org or call **800-813-HOPE (4673)**.

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