



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 symptoms of chemobrain involves finding ways to help you remember things better and doing activities that keep your memory sharp. Below is a list of tips for coping with chemobrain. Check off the ones that you think would be most helpful, and then give them a try to see which work best for you.

**Make lists.** Carry a pad with you and write down the things you need to do. For example, keep lists of things to buy, errands to run, phone calls to return, and even the times you need to take your medicines. Cross items off as you finish them.

**Use a planner or personal organizer.** These can help you stay on top of day-to-day tasks and keep track of appointments and special days like birthdays and anniversaries.

**Start a checklist of daily reminders.** For some people, this works better than a portable planner because you can hang it up in a place that is easy for you to see everyday. 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.

**Keep your mind active.** Do crossword puzzles and word games, or attend a class that interests you.

**Avoid distractions.** Work, read, and do your thinking in an uncluttered, peaceful environment. This can help you stay focused for longer periods of time.



**Keep a “memory planner.”** For many people, a smart phone or a simple notebook works. Use one to record everything in one place:

- lists of things to do
- the days, times and addresses for appointments
- your medication schedule
- important telephone numbers
- the names of people you meet and a little description of who they are

You can also use your “memory planner” as a journal to track chemobrain symptoms or other side effects, or to write down your accomplishments.

**Have conversations in quiet places.** This minimizes distractions and lets you concentrate better on what the other person is saying.

**Be Active.** Regular physical activity and eating healthy foods is good for your body and can make you feel more alert.

**Organize your environment.** Keep things in familiar places so you'll remember where they are.

**Repeat information aloud after someone gives it to you, and write down important points.** For example, before you write down an appointment, you might say, "Okay, so we're meeting at 2:00 p.m., Monday, June 3rd, at 503 Main Street."

**Train yourself to focus.** We often do one thing while thinking about another, which increases our chances of forgetting something important. For example, if you keep misplacing your keys, take extra time to think about or picture what you're doing every time you put them down. Also, say aloud to yourself, "I'm putting my keys on my dresser." Then look at them again, and repeat: "Keys on dresser." Hearing cues gives your memory an extra boost.

**Tell a loved ones what you're going through.** Tell your family, so that they'll understand if you forget things you normally wouldn't forget. They may be able to help and encourage you.

**Speak with an oncology social worker.** If living with symptoms of chemobrain makes you anxious or sad, seek help. Oncology social workers, such as those at CancerCare, can work with you to help you find ways to cope.



### **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 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 professional oncology social workers and world-leading cancer experts.

To learn more, visit [www.cancercare.org](http://www.cancercare.org) or call **800-813-HOPE (4673)**.

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