

Chemo Brain: What You Need to Know

If you are having memory problems and trouble focusing on tasks, finding words or managing daily activities, you are not alone. These are examples of “chemo brain,” a side effect of cancer treatment, especially chemotherapy. This fact sheet covers:

- Symptoms of chemo brain
- How a health care journal can help
- Questions to ask your doctor
- How an oncology social worker can help



Symptoms of Chemo Brain

Coping with chemo brain involves finding ways to help you remember things better and doing activities that keep your memory sharp. For tips to cope with chemo brain, read CancerCare’s fact sheet titled “Coping with Chemo Brain: Keeping Your Memory Sharp.”

Signs of chemo brain can include:

- Forgetfulness or memory lapses
- Difficulties concentrating or focusing on tasks
- Trouble recalling or remembering common words or names
- Struggling to do more than one task at a time



Start a Health Care Journal

If you experience chemo brain or any treatment side effects, a health care journal can be helpful. Having a journal or notebook will allow you to keep all of your health information in one place. If you are experiencing chemo brain, it may be helpful write down the following in your journal or notebook:

- The time and place you first experienced any chemo brain
- What you were doing and any symptoms you experienced
- The frequency of your chemo brain symptoms
- Any activity that has helped you cope with chemo brain
- Any medications you are taking
- Any questions you may have for your health care team

Have this journal along any time to you talk your health care team.



Questions to Ask Your Doctor

If you have problems with memory and attention, speaking with your doctor is an important first step in getting the care you need. Write down your questions and concerns about any side effects in your health care journal before your next medical appointment.

In addition to bringing questions, if possible, bring someone with you to any appointment. Another person can help reduce confusion. Here are questions that may want to ask your health care team:

- What is causing my chemo brain?
- How long do chemo brain symptoms usually last?
- Can you evaluate me to see if my chemo brain symptoms are related to anything that could be more easily treated, such as low blood count or other medications I am taking?
- Should I see a neuropsychologist? If so, can you refer me to one?
- What do you recommend I do to improve my memory?

In addition to your health care team, you may want to let friends and family know. You may be relieved talking to someone you trust and they can help you better cope with chemo brain.



The Role of Oncology Social Workers

Professional oncology social workers at CancerCare understand the complex issues that arise with a cancer diagnosis. Social workers can help you manage any emotional or practical concerns that may be causing chemo brain and help you develop ways to cope. CancerCare's professional oncology social workers help anyone affected by cancer, free of charge. To speak with a professional oncology social worker, call 800-813-HOPE (4673).

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 resource navigation, 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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