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CancerCare Chemobrain Information Series

Doctor, Can We Talk About Chemobrain?

Talking to your doctor can be difficult, especially about symptoms of chemobrain. Not all health care professionals know how to evaluate chemobrain, and many may be unfamiliar with the resources that are available to help. If you have problems with memory and attention, or other difficulties related to chemobrain, speaking with your doctor is an important first step in getting the care you need.

These are CancerCare's tips for communicating with your doctor about chemobrain:

- ✓ **When you use the word “chemobrain,” your doctor may not be familiar with it.** Tell him or her that *chemobrain refers to cognitive problems after chemotherapy.*
- ✓ **Bring someone with you.** It is always helpful to have a second set of ears, especially if you have trouble remembering information.
- ✓ **Write a list of the specific problems you are having and try to keep the descriptions short.** For example: “I can’t remember words,” or “It’s very hard for me to concentrate.”
- ✓ **Keep a journal to help you remember your symptoms.** Come prepared with information about when your symptoms started and if they are getting better or worse.
- ✓ **Write down the answers you get.** This way, you can go over the information later when you have time to research and concentrate.
- ✓ **If possible, bring a tape recorder.** It is OK to ask your doctor if you can record your visit.
- ✓ **Get a second opinion if your doctor doesn’t seem to take your thinking and memory problems seriously.** Your difficulties might go away, but if they persist, these symptoms should be evaluated by a neuropsychologist.



Here are some questions you may want to ask your health care team to help you understand your difficulties:

- How long do chemobrain symptoms usually last?
- Can you evaluate me to see if my chemobrain symptoms are related to anything that could be more easily treated, such as low blood count or other medications I am taking?
- Can you refer me to a neuropsychologist to be evaluated?
- If you don't believe I need an evaluation now, when should I come back for follow-up if these symptoms persist?
- How might cognitive remediation* and/or medication help me with these difficulties?
- Do you know a professional who might help me develop some strategies to make up for my problems with memory, attention and new learning?
- Is there anything else I should know? Is there anything I can read for more information on chemobrain?
- Show your doctor CancerCare's fact sheet, "Cognitive Problems after Chemotherapy." Ask your doctor about what he or she knows about resources in your community.

*Cognitive remediation: working with a trained professional to address problems related to thought processes.

CancerCare Can Help

CancerCare's staff of professional oncology social workers can help you address individual issues you may have when communicating with your doctor about chemobrain. We understand the importance of this relationship, and our social workers offer you detailed advice on the telephone, online, or in person to help you foster the best possible relationship with your health care team. CancerCare also offers education, information and referrals to other resources to help you improve communication with your health care team.

If you have questions about chemobrain or need more information, call CancerCare at 1-800-813-HOPE (4673) or visit us at www.cancercares.org.

CancerCare's *Chemobrain Information Series* was made possible through a grant from the Lance Armstrong Foundation.