



Getting Help for Chemo Brain

Some people with cancer might notice mental changes or cloudiness before, during, or after cancer treatment. This cloudiness or mental change is commonly called chemo brain.

What is chemo brain?

Most people describe chemo brain as changes in their thinking that makes them have trouble remembering some things, finishing tasks, concentrating on something, or learning new things.

The exact cause of chemo brain isn't known, but research has shown that some cancer treatments (most commonly chemotherapy) can cause changes in the brain, and some people with cancer notice mental changes even though they haven't had chemo.

Here are a few examples of what chemo brain may be like:

- Forgetting things that you usually have no trouble remembering
- Trouble focusing on what you're doing and taking longer to finish things
- Trouble remembering details like names, dates, and events
- Trouble remembering common words
- Trouble doing more than one thing at a time, like answering the phone while cooking, without losing track of one of them

These mental changes can happen at any time when you have cancer. For some people, these changes only last a short time. Other people may have long-term changes, while others may notice changes after treatment. In most cases, the changes are not easy to notice, and people around the person with cancer may not even notice any changes at all. Still, the people who have problems are aware of the differences in their thinking.

Can chemo brain be prevented?

At this time, there is no known way to prevent chemo brain. It seems to happen more with high doses of chemo and if the brain is treated with radiation therapy. But because chemo brain is usually mild and goes away over time, treatment plans should not be changed to try to prevent it.

Things you can do to deal with chemo brain

Day-to-day coping

- **Use a daily planner, notebooks, reminder notes, or your smart phone.** Keep everything in one place to make it easier to find the reminders you may need. Keep track of appointments and schedules, to-do lists, important dates, phone numbers and addresses, meeting notes, and even movies you'd like to see or books you'd like to read.

- **Do the most demanding tasks** at the time of day when you feel your energy levels are the highest.
 - **Exercise your brain.** Take a class, do word puzzles, or learn to do something new.
 - **Get enough rest and sleep.**
 - **Exercise your body.** Regular physical activity is good for your body; it improves your mood, makes you feel more alert, and helps you feel less tired.
 - **Eat your veggies.** Studies have shown that eating more vegetables can help you keep your brain power.
 - **Set up and follow routines.** Put the things you often lose in the same place each time you're done with them. Try to keep the same daily schedule.
 - **Try not to multi-task.** Focus on one thing at a time.
 - **Track your memory problems.** Keep a diary of when you notice problems and what's going on at the time. (You might track this in your daily planner.) Medicines taken, time of day, and where you are may help you figure out what affects your memory. Keeping track of when the problems are worst can also help you prepare by not planning important talks or meetings during those times.
 - **Try not to focus on how much chemo brain is bothering you.** Accepting the problem will help you deal with it. Patients say that being able to laugh about things you can't control can help you cope.
- And remember, you probably notice your problems much more than others do.

Telling others

Another thing you can do to help manage chemo brain is to tell family, friends, and your health care team about it. Let them know what you're going through. It may help you feel better.

Chemo brain is a side effect you can learn to manage. Even though this might be a change that's not easy to see, like hair loss or skin changes, your loved ones may have noticed some things and may even be able to help you. For example, they may notice that when you're rushed, you have more trouble finding things.

Tell your friends or loved ones what they can do to help. Their support and understanding can help you cope better.

Talk to your health care team.

Tell your health care team about the mental changes you're feeling. Let them know when you notice the changes, what you have trouble with, or things that make the changes worse or better. Don't wait until it affects your everyday life to tell your health care team. They may suggest you see a specialist who can work with you on ways to manage memory or thinking problems.

For cancer information, day-to-day help, and emotional support, call the American Cancer Society at **1-800-227-2345** or visit us online at **www.cancer.org**. We're here when you need us.



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