



Physical Concerns – Memory or Ability to Think

Online version with active resource links at: <http://cancer-help.me/memory>

Trouble remembering or thinking?

We all occasionally forget someone's name, where we put the keys, or the date. But, if memory loss is becoming troublesome, and you notice that it's happening more and more, it may be more than normal aging.

Memory or concentration issues or trouble processing information can be caused by different conditions, such as depression, cancer related treatment, mild cognitive impairment (MCI) or other health related problems.

If you are experiencing difficulty remembering things, thinking, or concentrating, it's important for you or a family member to tell your health care team.

Your doctor can assess your symptoms and advise you about ways to manage or treat these problems. Treating conditions such as poor nutrition, anxiety, depression, fatigue, and insomnia may also help.

Content adapted from websites below.

Memory or Concentration Problems and Cancer Treatment

Whether you have memory or concentration problems (sometimes described as a mental fog or chemo brain) depends on the type of treatment you receive, your age, and other health-related factors. Cancer treatments such as chemotherapy may cause difficulty with thinking, concentrating, or remembering things. So can some types of radiation therapy to the brain and immunotherapy.

These cognitive problems may start during or after cancer treatment. Some people notice very small changes, such as a bit more difficulty remembering things, whereas others have much greater memory or concentration problems.

Ways to Manage Memory or Concentration Problems:

Plan your day. Do things that need the most concentration at the time of day when you feel best. Get extra rest and plenty of sleep at night. If you need to rest during the day, short naps of less than 1 hour are best. Long naps can make it more difficult to sleep at night. Keep a daily routine.

Exercise your body and mind. Exercise can help to decrease stress and help you to feel more alert. Exercise releases natural chemicals in the body called endorphins, which give people a feeling of well-being. Ask what physical exercises may be helpful for you. Mind-body practices, such as meditation or guided imagery, as well as mental exercises such as puzzles or games also help some people.

Get help to remember things. Write down and keep a list handy of important information. Use a daily planner, recorder, or other electronic device to help you remember important activities. Make a list of important names and phone numbers. Keep it in one place so it's easy to find.

Talking with Your Health Care Team about Memory or Concentration Problems, consider adding these questions to your list:

- Am I at increased risk of cognitive problems based on the treatment I am receiving?
- When might these problems start to occur? How long might they last?
- Are there steps I can take to decrease these problems?
- What symptoms or problems should I, or a family member, call you about?
- Could I meet with a social worker to get ideas about additional support and resources?
- Are there specialists who could assess, treat, or advise me on these problems (neuropsychologists, occupational or vocational therapists, etc)?

Resources for Additional Information:

- [ASCO answers, Chemobrain](#)
- [NIH, Memory or Concentration Problems](#)
- [Family Caregiver Alliance®, Mild Cognitive Impairment](#)
- [American Cancer Society, Chemo Brain](#)
- [CancerCare, Chemobrain: What You Need to Know](#)
- [CancerCare.org, Coping With Chemobrain](#)
- [CancerCare.org, Improving Your Concentration](#)
- [Cancer.Net, Attention, Thinking, or Memory Problems](#)
- [Chemocare, Central Neurotoxicity, Memory Loss, and Their Relationship to Chemotherapy](#)

Recursos en Español:

- [NIH, Instituto Nacional Del Cáncer, Problemas de memoria o de concentración](#)
- [Cancer.Net, roblemas de la atención, el pensamiento y la memoria](#)
- [Chemocare, Náuseas, Neurotoxicidad central y pérdida de la memoria, y cuál es su relación con la quimioterapia](#)