

Chemobrain

You may have changes in thinking skills from cancer or chemotherapy (chemo). Changes may range from mild to severe. Sometimes these changes are called “chemobrain.”

Symptoms

Chemobrain may include any of the following:

- Slower recall of names, words or numbers
- Trouble concentrating
- Problems with memory
- Confusing dates and appointments
- Misplacing objects
- Having trouble doing more than one thing at a time
- Feeling mentally slower than usual

These changes may result from other causes. Examples include low blood counts, other medicines, anxiety or depression. Symptoms often fade after chemo ends. However, each patient is different. It may take a year or more after treatment for some patients to feel normal again.

Others do not regain full cognitive function.

Coping Tips

- Get adequate rest and nutrition.
- Manage fatigue.
- Stay physically and mentally active.
- Practice relaxation.
- Use memory aids on your smartphone, day planner or calendar.
- Create a daily task list.
- Set audible alerts such as the alarm on your smartphone or watch for reminders.
- Use a “memory station”: always place important items, such as keys, in the same place.
- Minimize distractions.
- Manage depression and anxiety. Easing stress and elevating mood can ease symptoms.

If you have symptoms of chemobrain, let your physician know so they are able to help manage your chemo side effects. They can assess your strengths and weaknesses. This can lead to treatments to help, such as tools and memory aids. In some cases, certain medicines may be helpful.

Resources

Visit the National Cancer Institute website:

<https://www.cancer.gov/about-cancer/treatment/side-effects/memory>