

Chemobrain

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

Symptoms

Common symptoms of chemobrain, include:

- Slower recall of names, words and/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, such as low blood counts, other medications, anxiety or depression. Symptoms generally fade after chemo ends. However, each patient is different. Some take a year or more after treatment to feel normal again. Others do not regain full cognitive function.

Coping Tips

To help cope with chemobrain, try to:

- Get adequate rest and nutrition.
- Manage fatigue.
- Stay physically and mentally active.
- Practice relaxation.
- Use memory aids (e.g., 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,” meaning always place important items, like keys, in the same place.
- Minimize distractions.
- Manage depression and anxiety. Easing stress and elevating mood can ease symptoms.

Resources

Visit the National Cancer Institute website at www.cancer.gov/cancertopics/coping/physicaleffects/chemo-side-effects.

Visit www.div40.org/pdf/NeuropsychyBroch2.pdf for a brochure that tells more about neuropsychological assessment.