

Tips for Dealing with Memory or Thought Problems 'Cancer-Related Cognitive Dysfunction (CRCDD)'

After receiving treatment for cancer, some people report trouble with thinking. This is sometimes referred to as “chemo brain”. Symptoms include memory loss, difficulty paying attention, trouble completing multiple activities, and problems with math and language skills. Within one year of completing treatment, people often find these difficulties greatly improve or disappear. However, for some people, symptoms can continue for years after completing treatment.

Causes of memory or thought problems

Researchers are currently studying the exact causes of memory or thought problems in order to find better ways for prevention and treatment. Some factors that may contribute to the cause of memory or thought problems include:

- Low blood counts (especially red blood cells which carry oxygen)
- Stress
- Depression
- Anxiety
- Fatigue
- Sleep disturbances
- Medicines
- Hormonal changes
- Pain
- Loss of control

Below are some things that you can do to help manage “chemo brain”:

Simplify activities

- Break big activities into smaller manageable tasks.
- Avoid doing multiple tasks at the same time and complete one task at a time.
- Plan and allow extra time for tasks.
- Change or decrease your work hours or school load.
- Organize your environment so things remain in familiar places.

Avoid distractions

- Reduce or eliminate background television and radio noise.
- Choose a peaceful environment when working, reading or thinking.
- Have conversations in quiet places.
- Clear clutter.

Be aware of your limits and make adjustments

- Establish and stick to a routine.
- Keep lists, journals, personal organizers, and/or detailed calendars.
- Ask people to repeat things when needed and write down important points.

- Use Post-it® notes to avoid having to rely on your memory.
- Leave important reminders on your voicemail or send a text to yourself.
- Visit the Resource and Learning Center and ask for the “Patient Diary” to help track your care.

Be willing to ask others for help

- Ask family and friends to help with difficult chores such as grocery shopping.
- Take someone with you to appointments and treatments.
- Let your healthcare team know if you feel that your memory or thought problems are getting worse.
- Join a support group.

Take care of yourself

- Exercise, eat well, and get plenty of sleep.
- If you smoke, stop.
- Cut down on caffeine.
- Wear glasses and hearing aids if you need them.
- Take part in relaxation therapy such as yoga, guided imagery, or meditation.

Empower yourself

- Keep track of your symptoms and share them with your healthcare team.
- Keep your brain active by reading, doing puzzles, crosswords, or word-finds.
- Celebrate your progress, improvements, and successes.
- For more information about memory or thought problems, visit the following websites:
 - www.cancercare.org
 - Cancercare – includes counseling, education, financial assistance, and practical help.
 - www.carf.org
 - CARF: The Rehabilitation Accreditation Commission- lists accredited rehabilitation programs in each state and qualifies programs in outpatient medical rehabilitation, occupational rehabilitation, and brain injury rehabilitation, all of which may be helpful to patients with memory or thought problems.
 - <http://www.cancer-symptoms.com/>
 - This website designed by the Oncology Nursing Society provide information on learning about and managing common cancer treatment symptoms including memory or thought problems.
 - www.livestrong.org
 - Developed by the Lance Armstrong Foundation, this site provides the practical information and tools people living with cancer need to live strong. Included on this site is specific information about memory or thought problems.

If you are in need of immediate assistance, please call 732-235-2465 and select the option that best meets your needs.