

Combating Chemobrain: Keeping Your Memory Sharp

Many people going through cancer treatment notice changes in their memory and thinking abilities. Coping with symptoms of chemobrain involves finding ways to help you remember things better, and doing activities that keep your memory sharp. Below is a list of tips for combating chemobrain. Check off the ones that you think would be most helpful, and then give them a try to see which work best for you.

- Make lists.** Carry a pad with you and write down the things you need to do. For example, keep lists of things to buy, errands to run, phone calls to return, and even the times you need to take your medicines. Cross items off as you finish them.

- Use a portable planner or personal organizer.** These can help you stay on top of day-to-day tasks and keep track of appointments and special days like birthdays and anniversaries. Paper and electronic versions are available.



- Get a wall calendar.** For some people, this works better than a portable planner because you can hang it up in a place that is easy for you to see everyday. Put it on your refrigerator or even on your bathroom mirror so you'll be sure to look at it several times a day.

- Keep a “memory notebook.”** For many people, a simple, ruled notebook works just as well as a planner. Use one to record everything you need to remember, such as:
 - lists of things to do;
 - the days, times and addresses for appointments;
 - your medication schedule;
 - important telephone numbers; and/or
 - the names of people you meet and a little description of who they are.

You can also use your “memory notebook” as a journal to track chemobrain symptoms or other side effects, or to write down your accomplishments.

- Leave a message on your answering machine to remind yourself of something important.** When you listen to the message later, write down the information so you don't forget it.
- Organize your environment.** Keep things in familiar places so you'll remember where they are.

- Avoid distractions.** Work, read, and do your thinking in an uncluttered, peaceful environment. This can help you stay focused for longer periods of time.
- Have conversations in quiet places.** This minimizes distractions and lets you concentrate better on what the other person is saying.
- Repeat information aloud after someone gives it to you, and write down important points.** For example, before you write down an appointment, you might say, “Okay, so we’re meeting at 2:00 p.m., Monday, June 3rd, at 503 Main Street.”
- Keep your mind active.** Do crossword puzzles and word games, or go to a lecture on a subject that interests you.
- Proofread.** Double-check the things you write to make sure you’ve used the right words and spelling.
- Train yourself to focus.** We often do one thing while thinking about another, which increases our chances of forgetting something important. For example, if you keep misplacing your keys, take extra time to think about or picture what you’re doing every time you put them down. Also, say aloud to yourself, “I’m putting my keys on my dresser.” Then look at them again, and repeat: “Keys on dresser.” Auditory (hearing) cues give your memory an extra boost.
- Exercise, eat well and get plenty of rest and sleep.** Research shows that these things help keep your memory working at its best.
- Consider telling loved ones what you’re going through.** Depending on how private a person you are, you might tell your family, so that they’ll understand if you forget things you normally wouldn’t forget. They may be able to help and encourage you.
- Speak with an oncology social worker.** If living with symptoms of chemobrain makes you anxious or sad, seek help. Oncology social workers, such as those at CancerCare, can work with you to help you find ways to cope.



CancerCare Can Help

CancerCare has a staff of professional oncology social workers who understand the challenges of cancer. We are available to help you address any concerns you may have about chemobrain or memory loss. We also provide education, counseling, financial help, and practical help, and all our services are *completely free of charge*. To learn more, call us at **1-800-813-HOPE (4673)** or visit www.cancer.org.



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