

Getting Help for Chemo Brain

For years, cancer survivors have worried and even joked about the cloudy thinking they notice before, during, and after chemo. This mental fog is called chemo brain.

Some people notice these changes even before they start treatment. So the term chemo brain may not be the best one to use, but it's what most people call it right now.

The brain usually recovers over time, but the mental changes cancer patients notice are real, not imagined. These changes can cause problems with school, work, or social activities.



What is chemo brain?

Research has shown that some cancer drugs can cause changes in the brain. These changes are in the parts of the brain that deal with things like memory, planning, and putting thoughts into action.

Here are just a few examples of what chemo brain may be like:

- Trouble remembering things you usually have no trouble recalling
- Trouble focusing on what you're doing and taking longer to finish things
- Trouble remembering details like names, dates, and events
- Trouble remembering common words

- Trouble doing more than one thing at a time, like answering the phone while cooking, without losing track of one of them

For some people, these changes come on fast and only last a short time. Others may have mild, long-term changes. In most cases, the changes are subtle, and others around the person with cancer may not even notice any changes at all. Still, the people who have problems are aware of the differences in their thinking. Many people don't tell their cancer care team about this problem until it affects their everyday life.

Can chemo brain be prevented?

We don't know what causes chemo brain, and at this time there's no way to prevent it. It seems to happen more with high doses of chemo. But because chemo brain is usually mild and goes away over time, treatment plans should not be changed to try to prevent it.



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