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EXPERT SPEAKERS HOPE
**NATIONAL NETWORKING
AID CONFERENCE FORUM
ON LYMPHOMA SUPPORT
CAREGIVERS EDUCATION**
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THERAPIES SIDE EFFECTS

CANCER-RELATED BRAIN FOG

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What are we talking about?

Research has shown that 1 in 3 people who have had treatment for cancer experience declines in their thinking abilities



What are we talking about?

- “Chemo-brain”
- “Brain fog”
- “Cancer-related cognitive disorder”

Whatever it is called, it is **frustrating!**



What it is not...

Cancer-related brain fog **is not:**

- Dementia
- Alzheimer's



More than Chemo Brain

- Reported by patients who:
 - Have had chemotherapy
 - Have had other types of therapies
 - Have not had treatment

➤ Cancer-related brain fog



You may notice difficulties:

- Concentrating and multi-tasking
- Maintaining focus, recalling details
- Remembering things that occurred recently
- Recalling old memories
- Completing tasks



You may notice difficulties:

- Processing information (slowed thinking speed)
- Maintaining attention or concentration
- Saying the right words (word finding) or keeping train of thought
- Doing math
- Thinking clearly



When Does Brain Fog Happen?

- Can start during diagnosis
- Most often noticed during treatment



What happened?

- Causes are poorly understood
- Causes may be different for different patients
- Causes may change over time



Causes

- Diagnosis
- Treatment
- Medical issues (infections, anemia)
- Stress
- Depression or anxiety and drugs to treat these conditions
- Emotional pressure



Causes

- Hormonal changes or hormone treatments
- Fatigue
- Pain and pain medications
- Nutrition
- Sleep issues
- Natural aging



Important!

Even though you may notice changes such as the feeling of “fogginess” or minor cognitive issues such as forgetfulness, for the most part this does not result in a loss of brain function (i.e. the ability to get through common daily tasks)



Will it get better?

- The experience varies
- For most, symptoms improve in the months following the completion of treatment
- Some describe never going completely back to their previous “normal”



Will it get better?

- For some, particularly older or very young patients who have received high doses of radiation to their brain, these symptoms may get worse
- If you continue to experience these symptoms, discuss them with your doctor



How is it treated?

- Currently no medical treatments
- Symptoms may be managed with changes in behavior and adopting new strategies



Coping Tips: Categories

- Memory Aids
- Organize Environment/Day
- Sharpen Mental Ability
- Reduce Mental Fatigue
- Maintain Healthy Lifestyle



Coping Tips: *Memory Aids*

- **Write lists**
 - Record anything important you need to remember or accomplish
- **Use a planner or organizer**
 - Electronic or paper version to keep track of appointments and important dates
 - Track your memory problems



Coping Tips: *Memory Aids*

- **Take photos**

- Use your smart phone to take photos of places or things you want to remember

- **Use a GPS**

- Relieve confusion when driving

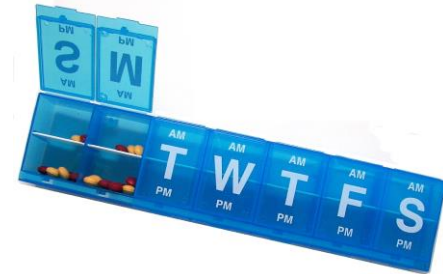
- **Set reminders**

- Set alarms on your smart phone
- Use sticky notes around the house



Coping Tips: *Organize Environment/Day*

- **Have dedicated places for important items (i.e. keys, wallet)**
 - Probably not the best time to re-organize your house
- **Talk through tasks**
 - This will help you remember each step in more complicated multi-step tasks
- **Use a pill organizer**



Coping Tips: *Organize Environment/Day*

- **Use ‘self-talk’ when completing tasks**
 - For example, say aloud “I switched off the stove at 7:15”
- **Plan ahead**
 - Schedule events when you are feeling your best
 - Think about what you want to say before you make a call
- **Create and maintain regular routines**



Coping Tips: *Sharpen Mental Ability*

- **Repeat important facts aloud**
 - Repetition helps the mind retain information
- **Avoid distractions**
 - Focus on what you are doing
 - Stay in the moment
- **Filter information**
 - Keep the important/relevant information



Coping Tips: *Sharpen Mental Ability*

- **Group numbers into pairs**
 - This will help you remember long numbers
- **Group items into categories**
 - This will help remember the items
- **Use brain games**
 - Sudoku, crosswords, memory games
 - Don't get frustrated



Coping Tips: *Reduce Mental Fatigue*

- **Have conversations in quiet places**
 - This will help you to focus on what the other person is saying
- **Be active**
 - Physical activity help cognitive functioning and overall mood
 - Walk, meditation, yoga, music
- **Reduce stress**
 - Stress can worsen your ability to think



Coping Tips: *Healthy Lifestyle*

“What is good for the heart is good for the brain”

- **Eat healthy foods/drink water**
- **Tell the people closest to you**
 - This is an adjustment for them as well as you
 - Let them help
- **Sleep**
 - Make sure you get enough rest
- **Socialize!**
 - Socializing helps to stay motivated/positive





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