

What is “chemobrain”?



Due to treatment for breast cancer, there is a risk of developing cognitive changes, or changes to the way you think. Any woman who has had chemotherapy or hormone therapy, is at risk for developing these cognitive changes. These changes, often called “chemobrain” or “chemofog”, cause problems with memory, attention, and the speed of thinking. Symptoms can vary. They may begin at the time of treatment or years after, then last for a short or long period of time.

If you have experienced cognitive changes after treatment, you are not crazy! It’s the chemobrain!

You may notice small changes like forgetting where you put things, having trouble concentrating at work, having problems doing more than one thing at a time, needing to be reminded of conversations, or feeling unlike yourself. These complaints are quite common of women who have chemobrain. More severe lapses in memory, attention, or functioning might be recognized as “chemotherapy-induced dementia”.

Chemobrain is caused by treatment of cancer, physical changes to the body (poor nutrition, physical or mental exercise, or health status due to other medical problems), stress and rest management challenges, and poor compensatory (coping)

What Can You Do?

Now that you understand what “chemobrain” is, you can begin to think about ways to reduce its effects in your daily life. A diagnosis of chemobrain is very treatable. The first step in treatment is recognizing the signs and symptoms. Once identified, you and your healthcare provider can work together to create a “cognitive prescription” to help rehabilitate your thinking processes. Your “prescription” will involve four key components: nutrition, physical activity, stress management, and compensatory (coping) strategies. As you following your prescription, you will likely see improvements in your memory, attention, and speed of thinking.